

Educational Ideas and Ideals of Gandhi and Tagore

**Educational
Ideas and Ideals
of
Gandhi and Tagore**

**A comparative study with
relevance to modern India**

By

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2nd Edition : Revised & Enlarged

**New Book Society of India
PUBLISHERS, POST BOX No. 250
NEW DELHI**

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First Edition : November 1944

Second Edition : August 1946

Price in India : Rupees Fifteen

Foreign : Dollars Four or Shillings Twenty Five

**Printed at
CLARIDGE'S PRESS
Original Road, New Delhi.**

***Dedicated
to
the memory of
my beloved wife Jaya.***

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the problems that India presents today, there is probably none so pressing, none so urgent, as the problem of educational reconstruction. In the proposed study of the educational ideas of the two great educational thinkers of India, namely Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, the writer finds certain suggestions helpful to all those interested in the problem. As the title of the study indicates, the problem of educational reconstruction is one of the problems of modern India and therefore certain educational measures are needed for reconstructing Indian education on modern lines. The writer hopes that a study of the educational philosophy and ideas of the above mentioned thinkers will illumine the path and enlarge the scope for free thinking along new lines.

The relevance of such a study in regard to modern India will become significant only in the context of the historical study of the educational system of India. Many of the modern ideas in education have all along been imported from the West. They were not modified as much to suit the Indian conditions. The history of the present system of schools, colleges and universities which are maintained at public expense dates from the time of the advent of the British rule in India and especially from the time of Lord Macaulay, the great historian, who was the most important among the personnel of the Government of India at that time. He conceived the scheme of making a class of brown Englishmen who would look out beyond the seas for inspiration, regard Britain as their spiritual home and

look down upon the spiritual culture and tradition of their mother country. He wanted to form a class who would be interpreters between the English and the millions they governed, a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect.

Under the above system of education in Indian schools and colleges, great importance was given to English Literature and English History, while Indian Literature was shamefully neglected and Indian History taught in schools, usually began with Clive and Warren Hastings who were described as great heroes. But at the same time, great heroes of India were not given their rightful place in the study of history in the Indian curriculum. One thing, however, this system did accomplish—it brought together the different peoples of the country speaking different languages through the medium of English, which was made compulsory during the British rule and through this foreign medium, Science, which is the greatest contribution that the West has to offer to the East, became available to the Indian students. But it was not an unmixed blessing. Learning of English brought up another caste the English-educated, a separate class of intellectual elite. It had drawn up a wall between a section of the people and another. But these barriers and walls are no longer good and therefore, they have to be pulled down.

Further, in regard to higher education, certain evils have become persistent. Most of the existing universities are merely examining bodies, with a large number of colleges and schools affiliated to them, excepting a few residential ones. The system of examination, as is well known, is also very strict, with the result that there are a large number of inevitable failures. The curriculum is very narrow and does not prepare students to meet

life situations which are more important than mere passing examinations and becoming petty Government officials or simply filling the posts of clerks in business and Government offices.

Thus, one of the greatest faults of the Indian educational system has been that there is too much theory and too little of practice. Undue emphasis upon knowledge, purely for the sake of knowledge, though not by itself very bad, has produced a class of intellectual aristocrats who are satisfied with mere knowledge of things, ideas and persons; with the practical side of this knowledge, they have not very much concerned themselves. Education has been imparted through the foreign medium, ill-suited to the genius of the country. In this way everything that they learned had no practical bearing.

The problem that is facing India today is the problem of educational reconstruction to suit the needs of modern India. Today, India is a free country. In the present political set-up, the needs of modern India are quite different from those of British India. In a sovereign democratic republic, there is a need for educated public opinion which cannot be secured easily by means other than universal, compulsory and free education. The universal spread of knowledge may not become possible through a foreign medium. Therefore there is a need for a gradual, though not a quick, change-over from the foreign medium to the regional language or the mother-tongue as medium of instruction.

Similarly there are other problems. India is a secular State. Religious instruction cannot be compulsory in such a State. At the same time, educationists are divided in their views regarding religious instruction in schools. Both could be

said on either side. In a country like India, where there are people belonging to various religions and to various denominations of the same religion, certain natural difficulties arise in the present context. Therefore, whether or not to give religious instructions to boys and girls in schools is another problem.

There are also the problems of sex education, problems of students' indiscipline in schools and colleges, and different views on what should be the national language of India and whether study of English should be made optional or compulsory in higher education and whether English or mother-tongue should be the medium of instruction in colleges and universities. These are some of the important problems of modern India which require hard thinking.

In the present context, the writer has appropriately selected and chosen the study of the two most important educational philosophers and their ideas, 'Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore', respectively, who have given serious thinking to such issues. They are the two foremost free thinkers of India, be it in the matter of politics, or religion or education. Both of them were the two leading thinkers who fought for liberating India from the bondage of the West—not only politically, but also intellectually. They were pioneers, not only in having stood for India's political freedom, but also in having made sincere and bold experiments in education—attempts at revolutionising Indian educational thought, and restoring the truly national mind, which for nearly two centuries have been suppressed, by starting national system of education.

Throughout the 50 years of his public career Gandhiji's rôle was that of an educationist and teacher in the real sense of the term since he was

essentially concerned with awakening the potentialities of the masses. Similarly, in the case of Rabindranath Tagore, after his fortieth year, he has been known to be making great experiments in education beginning with one of his own sons and a few other boys of the neighbourhood as in the case of Mahatma Gandhi. Tagore is ordinarily associated with his school at Santiniketan and later with his Visva-Bharati or International University. Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi is usually identified with what is popularly known as the Basic National Education or the Wardha Scheme. But it is a pity that there are many who lose sight of the greater contributions of both of these educational thinkers, in whose writings one finds wealth of educational ideas and certain philosophic tendencies, which when properly studied and understood, would constitute high-water mark achievements of geniuses.

They were the first to think in terms of the education of the masses in India long before India got Independence, and probably they were the first two great men who ventured to make bold experiments in education and also to make known to the world that India has something to contribute to others. Mahatma Gandhi's great contribution lies in his Basic Scheme which has given a practical bias to the hitherto purely theoretical education, by making it activity-centred. Similarly, the great contribution of Rabindranath Tagore lies in Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati, the legacy which he has left to mankind. Both the school at Bholpur and the International University or Visva-Bharati, as it is called, have been built around the personality of a very great man of this generation, who was not only a dreamer of dreams but also gave practical shape to his dreams and Shantiniketan is no doubt the manifestation of one such dream. The greatness of this institution is the greatness of his contribution, which in turn is the greatness of his personality.

The true greatness of his educational institution lies in the intimacy of relationship that has been brought into existence or established between the teacher and the taught in their every-day life, both inside and outside the class hours. Students were paid individual attention, which is far from being practised now-a-days, and what is more, Santiniketan was not a factory to turn out degree-holders. There was better scope here for closer contacts between the teacher and the pupil. Another reason why Tagore deserves a study is because of the fact that he did not fail to give a practical bias to education as some mistakingly think. Of course, Santiniketan stressed human aspects and cultural development more than knowledge of Science. It paid special attention to dance, music and art which were very important aspects and which had been neglected by other universities. The ideals laid down by Gurudev Tagore were not only the ideals for this institution and India alone, but for the whole world. But at the same time it has to be pointed out, that Tagore taught social work at Sriniketan, a branch of Visva-Bharati, where great stress was laid on intimate contact between educated men and rural India. That is just what is being done now by the Community Development Projects which offer opportunities for such contacts.

The Method of Approach

The scope of the study is limited to the educational ideas that are to be found scattered in the various works of both the educationists. However, the writer has tried to make an humble attempt at studying the various relevant works on educational ideas written by both thinkers and by others and as a result of such a study, an effort has been made to analyse them and present them in a coherent manner.

The method of approach is more or less that of description and study in a historical perspective. The writer has tried to present the educational ideas in an order of progression, in case of both the educational philosophers, and hence it has been found useful to devote a separate section to a study of the early education of both the thinkers which has exercised considerable influence on them at least to the extent of making them aware of the evils of the then existing system of education in schools and colleges and revolting against them, later with a view to reform it.

The writer has taken care to see that the evolutionary aspect in the development of educational ideas is not neglected, without which they could not be presented as a coherent whole. Therefore, a separate section has been devoted to a study of the educational ideas of Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore in an evolutionary setting.

The educational philosophy and ideas of both have been first treated individually, and as far as possible exhaustively before attempting a comparison. There are certain points of similarities and dissimilarities in regard to certain views on educational matters between the two, but yet

similarities are more to be found than dissimilarities. In the separate section that has been devoted to a comparative study of the educational ideas of Gandhi and Tagore, the writer has taken care to see that wherever both think along either on identical lines, or differently is brought out to the attention of the reader.

The study has been made as critical and objective as possible though no claim could be made regarding the perfection of such a study. The writer has tried to analyse the ideas of both the experimenters in education under various headings with a view to make the analysis a comprehensive one to the extent possible.

In the sections on 'The Educational Ideas and Ideals of Gandhi and Tagore' only certain of those important aspects of education in case of both the thinkers have been discussed since, the other aspects have been dealt with casually in the relevant contexts. The various experiments in education made by Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Rabindranath Tagore have also been described exhaustively.

Towards the conclusion, the writer has kept in mind the contributions of the two great educational thinkers of India, which are more or less legacies, not only to India, but to the whole of mankind. Therefore, the primary purpose of the study has been to make a comparative study of India's two great leaders whose contributions are no less in the field of education than in the field of either politics or literature.

R. S. Mani

Prefatory Note to the Second Edition.

The fact that the first edition of this book was exhausted within less than two years of its release indicates the favourable public response. Encouraging reviews were published in various leading English Dailies, Weeklies and Educational Journals of the country. The author takes the opportunity to express gratitude to a large number of friends, teachers and educationists who appreciated this work and offered valuable suggestions.

But at the very outset it may be explained that this work was originally presented for Doctoral Thesis to the University of Madras and while publishing it, material changes of a radical nature which could be warranted by circumstances, were not permissible as per the standing regulations of the University. Therefore, the author regrets his inability to incorporate all the suggestions received.

However, the author would venture, in this second edition, to clarify certain basic issues. In doing so, the author does not wish to contradict his original views, but is only explaining relevant facts and current opinions on the live subject in a proper perspective and also in an objective spirit. A brief note in this regard is appended.

In the present edition, a novel feature is the inclusion of an additional section on "The Philosophic Under-currents in the Educational Ideas of Gandhi" in Part I and another on "The Philosophic Under-currents in the Educational Ideas of Tagore" in part II, both forming an integral part of the Doctoral Thesis.

Tanjore,

R. S. Mani

August 10, 1964.

E D U C A T I O N

**without culture and character
is of little value.**

PART I

It is no exaggeration to say that a human being without education is not far removed from an animal. Education, therefore, is necessary for women as it is for men. Not that the methods of education should be identical in both cases. Man and woman are of equal rank, but they are not identical. They are a peerless pair, being supplementary to one another; each helps the other, so that without the one the existence of the other, cannot be conceived, and therefore, it follows as a necessary corollary from these facts, that anything which impairs the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of them both. In framing any scheme of women's education, this cardinal truth must be constantly kept in mind. Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married pair, and, therefore, it is in the fitness of things that he should have greater knowledge thereof. On the other hand, home life is entirely the sphere of woman, and, therefore, in domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children, women ought to have more knowledge. Not that knowledge should be divided into watertight compartments, or that some branches of knowledge should be closed to anyone; but unless courses of instruction are based on a discriminating appreciation of these basic principles, the fullest life of man and woman cannot be developed.

Mahatma Gandhi

SECTION I

Gandhi's Early Education

Glimpses into the boyhood days of Mahatma Gandhi might help one to better understand the intrinsic design of his mind in matters educational. Speaking about himself with great humility, he says, "I recollect having been put to school. It was with some difficulty that I got through the multiplication tables. The fact that I recollect nothing more of those days than having learnt in company with other boys, to call our teacher all kinds of names, would strongly suggest that my intellect must have been sluggish and my memory raw,"¹ The above illustrates that the school of Gandhi's boyhood days was not of a desirable type and therefore, the education imparted in that school was far from satisfactory.

From his autobiography, it is learnt that he was put into a primary school at the age of seven at Rajkot. He appears to have been just a mediocre student while at Rajkot school. Then he attended the suburban school and from there he went, to the high school, having already reached the twelfth year. He seems to have been always methodical in his studies. His books and lessons were his sole companions. It is also learnt from his autobiography that he never paid enough attention to games and physical activities during his school days, for which he had to pay a

1. Page 14, *An Autobiography or My Experiments with Truth*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1945.

heavy penalty later in his life. Since he had to attend his sick father, naturally he could not devote enough attention to physical culture. It also seems that he did not read anything more or beyond his regular lessons. He says, "As a rule I had a distaste for any reading beyond school books. The daily lessons had to be done, because I disliked being taken to task by my teacher as much as I disliked deceiving him. Therefore I would do the lessons, but often without my mind in them. Thus when even the lessons could not be done properly, there was of course no question of any extra-reading."²

He did not have any high regard for his abilities. Therefore, whenever he obtained prizes and scholarships he used to be astonished. Commenting about his schooldays he says, "I was not regarded as a dunce at the high school. I always enjoyed the affection of my teachers. Certificates of progress and character used to be sent to the parents every year. I never had a bad certificate."³ That shows his conduct and character must have been always good. Even the least defect in his character would draw tears from his eyes. It also shows how even from his boyhood days, he valued character as more important in education than anything else. Explaining the neglect of games and physical activities, he remarks, "I never took part in any exercise, cricket or football before they were made compulsory. My shyness was one of the reasons for my aloofness, which I now see, was wrong. I then had the false notion that gymnastics had nothing to do with education. Today I know that physical training should have as much place in the curriculum as mental training."⁴

Another great defect in his early education was

2. Page 16, *Ibid.*

3. Page 27, *Ibid.*

4. Page 27, *Ibid.*

his neglect of handwriting. He felt later that he had to pay heavily for the neglect. Remarking about this defect, he points out, "I do not know whence I got the notion that good handwriting was not a necessary part of education, but I retained it until I went to England. When later in South Africa I saw the beautiful handwriting of lawyers and young men born and educated in South Africa, I was ashamed of myself and repented of my neglect. I saw that bad handwriting should be regarded as a sign of imperfect education."⁵

He further remarks, "Let every young man and woman be warned by my example and understand that good handwriting is a necessary part of education."⁶ By good practice he was able to improve his handwriting and also perfect it, which was previously very bad. Therefore his experience may be taken as a lesson for others; and of his rich experience he further points out, "I am now of opinion that children should first be taught the art of drawing before learning to write. Let the child learn his letters by observation as he does different objects, such as flowers, birds, etc. and let him learn handwriting only after he has learnt to draw objects. He will then write a beautifully formed hand."⁷ The defect, namely bad handwriting is even now widespread among the modern educated boys and girls. The educational authorities in schools and colleges have not drawn the attention of the pupils to this great defect in education. Therefore Gandhi's observation in this connection on the improvement of one's handwriting is worth pondering over.

Once he got double promotion—he was only for six months in the third standard and was promoted

5. Page 28, *Ibid.*

6. Page 28, *Ibid.*

7. Page 28, *Ibid.*

to the fourth after the examination. English became the medium of instruction from the fourth standard and therefore he found himself at sea. For example, he found Geometry—the propositions of Euclid, difficult but later with much effort, by exercising his simple and pure commonsense he was able to get through it. In this connection he observes, “A subject which only required a pure and simple use of one’s reasoning powers could not be difficult. Ever since that time Geometry has been both easy and interesting for me.⁸” Gandhi was industrious by nature always and therefore he never found any subject difficult to master.

Even during his schooldays he took delight in learning other languages besides his own mother-tongue, Gujarati. He does not seem to have found it difficult --learning several languages at the same time was not a problem for him. From his own experience, he found that a scientific study of one language facilitated the understanding of other languages and made their study comparatively easy. It was his conviction that such a study of several languages would become all the more easy if only the boys and girls were taught all the subjects in their own mother-tongue. To put it in his own words, “It is now my opinion that in all Indian curricula of higher education there should be a place for Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and English, besides of course the vernacular. This big list need not frighten any one. If our education were systematic and the boys free from the burden of having to learn all their subjects through a foreign medium, I am sure learning all these languages would not be an irksome task, but a perfect pleasure. A scientific knowledge of one language makes a knowledge of other languages comparatively easy.”⁹ From this

8. Page 29, *Ibid.*

9. Page 30, *Ibid.*

it is evident that Gandhi believes in the transfer value theory of learning *i.e.*, that the discipline acquired in studying a particular subject is transferred to other subjects while studying them even though modern psychologists do not seem to believe in such a theory.

He did not get any systematic religious instruction at school but the religious toleration and universal religious outlook that he had, seems to have been obtained through the influence of home training—early grounding in toleration for all branches of Hinduism and sister religions. Regarding religious instructions, in his school days he observes, "From my sixth or seventh year up to my sixteenth I was at school, being taught all sorts of things except religion. I may say that I failed to get from the teachers what they could have given me without any effort on their part."¹⁰ The later contribution of Gandhi to moral and religious education—faith in the need for an universal religion and consideration of all religions to be good, took deep root in his mind, even in his school days. He aptly remarks: "But one thing took deep root in me—that conviction that morality is the basis of things and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day and my definition of it also has been ever widening."¹¹ For Gandhi, the term "religion" connoted a broader meaning than the mere narrow one of sectarian religion. It meant self-realisation or knowledge of Self.

He passed the matriculation examination in 1887 and later he pursued his higher studies in the Samaldas College at Bhavnagar. There he found himself completely at sea—everything was difficult

10. Page 47, *Ibid.*

11. Page 51, *Ibid.*

for him. Naturally, thereafter on the advice of one of the best friends of the family, it was decided that he should go to England to qualify himself for the Bar. In England he had to qualify himself for the London Matriculation Examination with great difficulty. The change from India to England was really something great for him as it must have been naturally. The English luxurious life fascinated him very much and he began to ape the Western manners. It took him some time to realise the value of simplicity and the futility of an artificial life. He found that this change in his way of life in England really harmonized his inward life with his outward one.

The course of study in law in England appeared easy for Gandhi and in his opinion the examinations in law had practically no value. He passed the examination in law very easily and was called to the Bar in 1891. In spite of it he never found himself qualified to practise law. He could realize how helpless he was. He had no knowledge of the world that a lawyer requires and therefore found himself at sea in applying the principles of law he had learnt, in practice. In such a state of affairs he could realise the importance of practical training and knowledge of the world as necessary parts of education.

Thus it could be seen that the early education of Gandhi had given him a thorough knowledge, understanding and keen insight into the grave defects of the then existing system of education in India. Even while at school where English was the medium of instruction from the fourth standard, the seeds of discontent about the system of education must have been sown and they must have sprouted and taken deep root in his mind during his stay in London where he qualified for the Bar in 1891, at the age of twenty two.

SECTION II

Gandhi's Philosophy of Education

(Gandhi's contribution to educational theory and practice is outstanding. He was a great educational thinker of modern India. The common people ordinarily identify his educational philosophy with the popular Wardha Scheme. It is of course an integral part of his educational philosophy but does not cover the whole of it. The Wardha Scheme is mainly concerned with the education of children between 7 and 14 years of age. This is not the only scheme which Gandhi had propounded. He had made several experiments in education during his lifetime, of which the Wardha Scheme is only a culmination of his system.) Therefore it is not synonymous with his entire philosophy of education. (In his system of thought, education is for life and through life and therefore everything is related to eternal values. He is a revolutionary educational thinker, in the sense that he wanted to bring about a new social order through his new scheme of education.)

He is a great idealist in educational philosophy. In his ideal society service unto man would be service unto God. According to him, the ultimate aim of man's life is the realisation of God and all his activities, social, political and religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. His ideal is that of universal brotherhood, to be brought about by *ahimsa*, which implies love for all and hatred for none.

(He is a practical educational philosopher and an experimentalist to the core. The whole of his life has been spent on experiments with Truth and the educational experiments have been one of the instruments for the realisation of his ideal in life. In his several educational experiments he has tried to translate his philosophy into actual practice. In fact his educational system has a great political philosophy—evolution and establishment of an ideal society. His educational system is the dynamic side of his entire philosophy. His several thoughts on education converge and do form a coherent and complete educational philosophy.

Gandhi has evolved a philosophy of paidocentric education. In his philosophy of education, the personality of the educand is of greater significance than the tools and subjects. He has restored the child to the legitimate place in the scheme of education.

Gandhiji's definition of education gives one an insight into his wonderful philosophy of education. ~~What is true education according to Gandhi?~~ By true education he meant an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man,—body, mind and spirit. For Gandhi mere literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means by which man and woman can be educated. Mere literacy, in his opinion, can never be the be-all and end-all of education. Therefore, he attaches little value to literacy in his scheme of education.)

It has become clear that (his objective of education is the harmonious development of man,—body, mind and spirit.)

How is that objective to be realised? A suitable method has to be prescribed. What is the method?

Realising the wasteful and harmful effects of the then existing system of education, he has thought about the remedial measures, which according to him lie in educating the children by means of vocational or manual training. He would begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. He held the view that the highest development of the mind and the soul would be possible under such a system of education, with the proviso that every handicraft will be taught not merely mechanically but scientifically. That is the most essential feature of Gandhi's philosophy of education. According to him education must revolve round vocational and manual activity as the centre and all syllabi should be woven around vocational training. All training will be mainly through the medium of and in correlation with a productive industry.

(True education in his view is the whole development of the person in the boys and girls. Such a development can take place only when education is imparted through a suitable craft. Therefore, according to Gandhi, a suitable handicraft should form the centre and basis of all education. That is the core of Gandhi's educational philosophy. He considers the handicraft chosen to be the source from which every activity and experience should spring. According to Gandhi training centred round a suitable handicraft has both educational and economic value. The educational value lies in the development of the whole man through the craft and its economic value lies in its productive or self-supporting aspect.)

Being a practical educationist, he conceived of education not merely in terms of acquisition of knowledge or storing of facts but in terms of activity and experience.

The two basic principles of his educational philosophy are that education should be woven around a suitable craft and that the craft chosen should as far as possible meet the expenses of the teachers' salaries.

By making education craft-centred and emphasising the self-supporting aspect, he proposed to accord dignity of labour and ensure modest and honest livelihood and not guarantee economic independence of either the pupil or the school. According to him the craft chosen should be learnt in such a scientific way that its produce would have economic value.

In the school of Gandhi's imagination all teaching will be carried out through concrete life-situations relating to craft or to social and physical environment, so that everything that is learnt will be assimilated. The school will become a place of work, experimentation and discovery because of its activity curriculum. In such school, the child will acquire his knowledge actively and not through passive absorption of information imparted second-hand. The child will also utilize the acquired knowledge for the proper understanding and better control of his social environment.

(Another important feature of Gandhi's educational philosophy is the sense of social responsibility which his scheme of education infuses. Since education is related to concrete life-situations and has a social purpose of bringing about a new social order, naturally, the ideal of citizenship is inherent in his scheme. In a democratic society, training for citizenship is very essential. Therefore, Gandhi long ago has anticipated the need for training of proper citizens through a good system of education. Only intelligent citizens will be able to repay in the form of some useful services what they owe to

society as members of an organized, civilized community. Therefore, Gandhi advocates a scheme of education which will fit in the future citizen for playing his role in society.) If he is to discharge his duties faithfully as a loyal citizen he must possess sound character for which appropriate training will have to be provided in the school. Further, he will be expected to practise certain civic virtues at school and also learn the art of discipline and self-government. A breadth of vision, toleration and good neighbourliness will also have to be cultivated. To meet the needs of modern India, a completely new system of education has been evolved by Gandhi which requires the intelligent exercise of rights and duties of citizenship.

He wanted the educational system to be so framed as to suit the genius of the people of the country. What struck him in Europe during his travels was that education followed the peculiar genius of the people. One thing was taught in three different countries in three different ways according to the varying culture and genius of each. Similarly, he wanted to introduce a system of national education in India which will be peculiar to her genius.

Another important feature of his educational philosophy is the close relationship which he wanted to establish between education and the physical and social environment. Emphasising that education must be suited to the surroundings he points out, "Every educationist, everyone who has had anything to do with the students, has realized that our educational system is faulty. It does not correspond to the requirements of the country, certainly not to the requirements of pauper India. There is no correspondence between the education that is

given and the home life and the village life.”¹ Thus it is evident, that Gandhi could see that the present system of education in India is both unreal and artificial due to the great divorce that has taken place between the school and the home and social environment. In emphasising the need for a close correspondence between the two he has gone far ahead of the times in educational thought.

Religion¹ was an important element in his life and, therefore, it was a great living force for him. In his view, religion is related to every aspect of life. Just as politics is not divorced from religion, so also education is not divorced from it. In his scheme of things a liberal education to all should include a reverent study of other faiths. He did not regard any of the great religions of the world as false or inferior. According to him, culture of the mind must be subservient to the culture of the heart and that should be the basis of all sound education. In his philosophy of education, spiritual training is far more important than mere training of the intellect.

Gandhi accords a rightful place to creative activities in his scheme of education. He wanted to develop originality in the children by means of creative practical activities. Even while making education craft-centred, he emphasised, the need for an intelligent approach to industrial training. In his educational reconstruction he laid a special emphasis on manual and industrial training. There are some who think that such a training would dull one's understanding and imagination. Gandhi maintained that by making one's brains a store-house of information or by cramming facts, one's understanding was opened. On the other hand he held the view that an intelli-

1. Page 106, *To the Students* — M.K. Gandhi (1949), Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

•gent approach to an industrial training would often be a more valuable aid to the intellect than an indifferent reading of literature.

(He attached the greatest importance to primary education, which according to his 'conception, should be equal to the present matriculation less English. What the Zakir Hussain Committee called Basic National Education was renamed by him as Rural National Education through village handicrafts.) He explained it as follows : "Rural excludes the so-called higher or English Education. 'National' at present connotes truth and non-violence. And 'through village handicrafts' means that the framers of the scheme expect the teachers to educate village children in their villages so as to draw out all their faculties through some selected handicrafts in an atmosphere free from superimposed restrictions and interference. Thus considered, the scheme is a revolution in the education of the village children. It is in on sense an importation from the West."²

The above illustration contains the core of Gandhi's educational philosophy. He relates education to vocational or manual training, centred round a basic craft which need not necessarily be spinning and weaving ; any kind of craft may be chosen which will suit the special needs of the locality. His educational philosophy is based on the fundamental principles of Truth and Non-violence. To put it in a nutshell, the educational philosophy of Gandhi is contained in his formulation of aims and objectives of education for realization of which he has laid down the procedure and programme.

2. Page iii, *Basic National Education*, 'Hindustani Talimi Sangh, Sewagram, Wardha, M.P.

SECTION III

Gandhi's Aim of Education

Educational philosophers at different periods in history have formulated different aims of education. Naturally therefore, there has been no unanimity among them regarding the ultimate aim of education. It is no wonder then that the educational thinkers of different ages and countries contradict one another.

Different educational thinkers might have formulated different aims and ideals in education, each differing from the other but there are very few instances of one individual setting forth different aims of education, which at the same time come under one all-inclusive and all-comprehensive aim. Gandhi is a typical example of an educational philosopher who has set forth not only one aim but different aims which are not exclusive of one another but come under one all-inclusive and all-comprehensive aim. Even though Gandhi's different aims appear at the outset to contradict each other, they are in fact only the different views he held from different standpoints at different times and in different places.

The different aims set forth by Gandhi from time to time are correlated to his philosophy and ideals of life. The end of knowledge, according to Gandhi, has been building up of sound character. True education, he thought, should draw the best out of the students. Schools and colleges should not become factories for making Government employees

or clerks in commercial offices. His ideal of education was attainment of peace and bliss and not wealth and power.

In a speech delivered before the students of the Shamaldas College, Bhavnagar, Gandhi says : "The parents take the lead in giving the wrong direction. They feel that their children should be educated only in order that they may earn wealth and position. Education and knowledge are thus being prostituted and we look in vain for the peace, innocence and bliss that the life of a student ought to be. Our students are weighed down with cares and worries when they should be really 'careful for nothing'. They have simply to receive and assimilate. They should know only to discriminate between what should be received and what rejected. It is the duty of the teacher to teach his pupils discrimination. If we go on talking indiscriminately, we would be no better than machines. We are thinking, knowing beings and we must in this period distinguish truth from untruth, sweet from bitter language, clean from unclean things and so on."¹

Thus Gandhi has aimed at discrimination as one of the tests of true education.

(His aim of education is both social and individual. His aim was not only individual perfection but he wanted to bring about a new social order based on Truth and Non-violence. Education had a social bearing for him and therefore it must be national and also within easy reach of all. According to him, that education is not national which takes no count of the starving millions of India and devises no means for their relief. Therefore, in his view, education must have the service motive behind it, besides the economic one.

1. Page 60, *To the Students*—M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

True education according to Gandhi, must strengthen man's faith in God and not weaken it. Since his ultimate aim of education was self-realization, faith in God was an indispensable condition for him to achieve the goal. He used to confess to a deep sense of sorrow that faith was gradually disappearing in the student world. He held that if their education turned them away from God it would neither help them nor could they help the world.

Education, has no value for him, if it does not enable one to attain self mastery and purity of heart. Education is nothing without character and character is nothing without elementary personal purity. Therefore the end of all knowledge, ^{for him} ~~for him~~ ^{character} was character-building. Personal character was the basis of a sound education. He aimed at purity in thought, speech and deed without which they were lost although they might become perfect, finished scholars. That education is absolutely worthless for him, if it is not built on a solid foundation of truth and purity.

Freedom was his keynote in education, just as it was so in his politics. He considered all learning to be worthless, if it did not infuse courage and dispel fear from one's mind. Personally he feared none but God. That did not mean, he was arrogant or disobedient; but fearlessness, he considered to be the greatest virtue which could be developed by proper education. The Western education has developed a fear complex—fear of consequences, mostly imaginary. Therefore, he wanted students to shed fear and not be afraid of rustication, poverty and even death. He characterised learning without courage like a waxen statue, beautiful to look at but bound to melt at the least touch of a hot substance.

Gandhi made *Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaya*—education is that which liberates—one of the most important aims of education. It was the motto of the Gujarat Vidyapith which was founded by him in 1920. This education for freedom can be interpreted in more than one sense. It may mean political freedom as well as spiritual liberation. Since the country was in bondage at that time, he was very particular that national education should aim at freedom enabling the students by their training to emancipate India from Western domination. By education for freedom, he might as well have meant spiritual liberation also, since his ultimate aim of education was self-realisation. He could not have meant either the one or the other only or only both. At the back of his mind must have been the idea of economic, political and intellectual freedom. He himself interpreted it as follows: "It means: That is knowledge which is designed for salvation. On the principle that the greater includes the less national independence or material freedom is included in the spiritual. The knowledge gained in educational institutions must therefore at least teach the way and lead to such freedom."² Thus his idea of education for freedom admits of broader interpretation.

That one of his aims of education is freedom is implicit in his answer to a question put to him by a student as to what he should do after finishing his studies. His reply was, "The ancient aphorism, Education is that which liberates", is as true today as it was before. Education here does not mean mere spiritual knowledge nor does liberation signify only spiritual liberation after death. Knowledge includes all training that is useful for the service of mankind and liberation means freedom from all manner of servitude even in the present life.

Servitude is of two kinds: slavery to domination from outside and to one's own artificial needs. The knowledge acquired in the pursuit of this ideal alone constitutes true study."³

His aim of education has a social basis. For Gandhi, education is preparation for life: if education is to prepare one for life, it must enable him to face the problems of life then and there. Only through a good education and proper training can such a preparation for life be made. According to Gandhi, an education of such a kind should enable the students to fight against social or other evils. That is why he observes: "There is something radically wrong in the system of education that fails to arm boys and girls against social or other evils. That education alone is of value, which draws out the faculties of a student so as to enable him or her to solve correctly the problems of life in every department."⁴

Gandhi's conception of New Education as formulated by him towards the close of his educational experiments, which is now known as Nai Talim, is education for life, through life. Education begins, according to him, from the moment of a child's conception to the moment of its death. Therefore, the training received by a child, either in the school or college is not the be-all and end-all of education. For Gandhi, a student does not cease to be a student the moment he leaves his scholastic or collegiate studies. Learning is a continuous process which does not stop at the high school stage or even after graduation. It has to be continued throughout life.

He aimed at the self-supporting aspect in education, perhaps from two points of view; one from

3. Page 288, *Ibid.*

4. Page 245, *Ibid.*

the point of view of quickening the pace of literacy and bringing about universal literacy within as short a period as possible. That was the only best means he could think of. Secondly, he wanted to teach children the dignity of labour and to make them learn to regard it as an integral part and a means of their intellectual growth and to make them realise that it was patriotic to pay for their training through their labour. The core of his suggestion was that handicrafts should be taught, not merely for productive work, but for developing the intellect of the pupils. He hoped that every boy and girl would work, not as a machine but as one intelligent unit, taking in crest in the corporate work done. According to Gandhi, an education, which cannot be self-supporting, must turn out only intellectual bankrupts, directing the energy of the students to waste, so as to get from them nothing valuable. Therefore, he considered a thorough industrial training to be essential if the students were to become self-reliant self-supporting. In a country like India, predominantly agricultural, he held the view that as part of the training of every youth, he must have a fair practical knowledge of agriculture and handweaving. In his opinion, one will lose nothing, if he knew a proper use of tools, can saw a piece of wood straight and build a wall that will not come down through a faulty handling of the plumber's line. According to him, a boy thus trained and equipped, will never feel helpless in battling with the world and never be in want of employment. He also held the view, that a knowledge of the laws of hygiene and sanitation as well as the art of rearing children, should form a necessary part of education of every boy and girl.

Thus, Gandhi thought that in order to make education compulsory or even available to every boy or girl wishing to receive education, the schools

and colleges should become almost, if not wholly, self-supporting, not through donations or State aid or fees exacted from students but through a remunerative work done by the students themselves.

This can be done, according to him, only by making industrial training compulsory side by side with literary training. Through such training he found it possible to make the students begin to recognize the dignity of labour and to establish a convention of regarding ignorance of manual occupation nothing short of a mark of disgrace. When in a country like America, which is the richest country in the world and where therefore perhaps there is the least need for making education self-supporting, it seems the most usual thing for students to pay their way wholly or partially. If that be the case in America, it is impossible to exaggerate the harm that is being done to Indian youths by filling their minds with the false notion that it is ungentlemanly to labour with one's hands and feet for one's livelihood or schooling. The harm done by such an education, Gandhi thought, was both moral and material, indeed much more moral than material.

To some, Gandhi's aim of education may seem to be materialistic since he lays stress on self-support and self-finance. But he does not ignore the cultural aspects of education. In one of his speeches to the students Gandhi observed: "I attach far more importance to the cultural aspect of education than to the literary. Culture is the foundation, the primary thing which the girls ought to get from here. It should show in the smallest detail of your conduct and personal behaviour, how you sit, how you walk, how you dress, etc., so that anybody might be able to see at a glance that you are the products of this institution. Inner culture must be reflected in your speech, the way in which

you treat your visitors and behave towards one another and your teachers and class.”⁵ The above illustrates the great regard that Gandhi had for cultural aspects in education.

Mere literacy was not the aim of education, according to Gandhi. The ordinary meaning of education is only a knowledge of letters—reading, writing and arithmetic. Since Gandhi thought more in terms of the masses than in terms of the individual, he was particular about making education useful for all. That is why the utilitarian aspect predominates in his view of education, though, it does not of course exclude the other aspects being involved in it. He was definitely of opinion that the prevailing ordinary primary education—a mere knowledge of letters would not add an inch to the happiness of the peasant and hence such an education would not be needed by him. According to him, “it does not make of us men. It does not enable us to do our duty.”⁶ By that it is not to be understood that he wanted to run down a knowledge of letters under any circumstance. He only did not want to make of it a fetish. He attached greater importance to spiritual training than mere literacy and therefore in his view, the ancient educational system was nobler and better than the existing primary education, since character-building found the first place in the ancient system. Speaking about the purely literary education, he remarks “It is not our *ku madhuk*. In its place, it can be of use, and it has its place when we have brought our senses under subjection, and put our ethics on a firm foundation. And then if we feel inclined to receive that education, we make good use of it. As an ornament, it is likely to sit

5. Page 291, *Ibid*.

6. Page 4, *Towards New Education*—M. K. Gandhi Navajivan, 1953.

well on us. It now follows that it is not necessary to make this education compulsory.”⁷ He held the view that character-building was independent of purely literary training and therefore, the latter by itself would not add an inch to one’s moral height, nor did it answer the wants of the people.

It was his belief that the prevailing primary education was practically of no use in after-life and became almost useless. A purely literary education, in his opinion, was lacking originality and naturalness. He even went to the extent of calling it an aboriginal system of education.

In the education of his own children, what he prized most were liberty and self-respect and not mere literary training. In his autobiography, he observes, “Had I been without a sense of self-respect and satisfied myself with having for my children the education that other children could not get, I should have deprived them of the object-lesson in liberty and self-respect that I gave them at the cost of literary training. And where a choice has to be made between liberty and learning, who will not say that the former has to be preferred a thousand times to the latter.”⁸

The curriculum and pedagogic ideas which form the fabric of modern education in India have been imported from Oxford and Cambridge, Edinburgh and London. Since they were essentially foreign, they were, in his opinion, ill-suited to the genius of the people of India. Therefore, according to Gandhi, “The fact to be realized is that India by the very fact of her long established and elaborated civilization had once the advantage of an educational system of her own, the only thing entitled to

7. Page 4, *Ibid.*

8. Page 248, *An Autobiography or My Experiments With Truth*—M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1945.

be called 'national'. But it was fundamentally distinct from the Anglo-Indian type and from the pseudonational type that is its descendant. The question then is this : The choice must be clearly and finally made between national and foreign education, the choice of type and archetype of meaning and purpose, of end and means."⁹ He deplored very much the social disruption, brought about by the foreign education. His aim, therefore, in education was to restore the national and social continuum.

His aim in education was not one of mere acquisition of knowledge for one's own sake but he wanted it to be bequeathed to posterity. The fruits of knowledge must be shared together by all. In his view, sound education must be rooted in the culture and life of the soil. If it is to be so rooted, there must naturally be a continuity in the social and cultural aspects of life. Any sudden break in such a continuity would spell enormous ruin. Gandhi rightly points out, "For that which should be remembered is this. The greatest visible evil of the present educational method, in itself evidence of deeper defects, is that it has broken up the continuity of our existence. All sound education is meant to fit one generation to take up the burden of the previous and to keep up the life of the community without breach or disaster. The burden of social life is continuous and if at any stage one generation gets completely out of touch with the efforts of its predecessors or in any case gets ashamed of itself or its culture, it is lost."¹⁰ Thus, it is obvious, that Gandhi aims at the preservation of cultural heritage and the improvement and enrichment of it for the sake of posterity, as one of the most important functions of education.

9 Page 26 *Towards New Education* — M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1953

10. Page 27, *Ibid.*

He pleads strongly for relating education to the environment. He puts it thus, "Unfortunately the system of education has no connection with our surroundings which therefore remain practically untouched by the education received by a microscopic minority of boys and girls of the nation."¹¹ In his view, the Indian children brought up in predominantly rural environment do not need the type of education the English children brought up in surroundings predominantly urban need.

One of his aims in education was the development of a harmonious and integrated personality. By education Gandhi meant an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man—body, mind and spirit. Mere literacy or knowledge of letters was not the end of education, nor even the beginning for him. It was only one of the means by which man and woman would be educated. Literacy in itself could not become education. Therefore, he would begin the child's education by teaching it a useful craft and enabling it to produce from the moment it began its training. He held the view that under a system of education which will be self-supporting and wherein every effort will be made to teach every subject through a craft, the highest development of the body, mind and spirit will be possible. Only every handicraft will have to be taught not merely mechanically but scientifically, *i.e.*, the child should know the why and wherefore of every process.

Gandhi aims at a proper co-ordination of and harmony among the various faculties of body, mind and spirit respectively for an all-round development. True education, according to him must result in an integrated personality and therefore a proper and all-round development of the mind can

take place only when it proceeds *paripassu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the mind. Gandhi rightly observed, "I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs *e.g.*, hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lop-sided affair."¹² Therefore, according to Gandhi it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that the body, intellect and spirit could be developed piece-meal or independently of one another.

Gandhi characterised the result of modern education as moral and spiritual anarchy. According to him, the prevailing education in schools and colleges has been in reality only intellectual dissipation, where intellectual training has been looked upon as something altogether unrelated to manual or physical work; wherein they vainly try to keep the body in health by means of an artificial and otherwise barren system of physical culture. The young man who emerges from such a system, according to him, can in no way compete in physical endurance with an ordinary labourer.

By education Gandhi meant a perfect, well-balanced, all-round development in which the body, the intellect and the spirit would all have full play and grow together into a natural, harmonious whole. The idea of an integrated personality is always before his mind. He conceives of man as neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. For the making of the

whole man, a proper and harmonious combination of all the three will be required which alone will constitute the true economics of education.

The elements that go into the true economics of education or those elements that form an integrated education are aptly explained by Gandhi himself which are worthy of study. As against the purely intellectual education that is obtaining today he takes the case of a child in whom the education of the heart is attended to from the very beginning. He observes, "Supposing he is set to some useful occupation like spinning, carpentry, agriculture, etc., for his education and in that connection is given a thorough comprehensive knowledge relating to the theory of the various operations that he is to perform and the use and construction of the tools that he would be wielding, he would not only develop a fine, healthy body but also a sound vigorous intellect that is not merely academic but is firmly rooted in and is tested from day to day by experience. His intellectual education would not only include knowledge of mathematics and the various sciences that are useful for an intelligent and efficient exercise of his avocation. If to this is added literature by way of recreation, it would give him a perfect, well-balanced, all-round education, in which the intellect, the body and the spirit have full play and develop together into a natural harmonious whole."¹³ Such was his conception of an integrated scheme of education that it was all-comprehensive in its scope and included the various sciences and arts as well, besides a craft round which everything else will have to be grouped.

There are some who accuse Gandhi of being guilty for having neglected literacy in his scheme of education. There is nothing in what he has said

13. pp. 43-44, *Ibid.*

or written to warrant such a belief. He contended that the children in the school of his conception would get their instructions through the handicrafts that might be taught them. He included literacy also though it was not the be-all and end-all of things.

In the columns of the *Harijan*, he clearly explains his scheme as such : ' "In my scheme of things, the hand will handle tools before it draws or traces the writing, the eyes will read the pictures of letters and words as they will know other things in life, the ears will catch the names and meanings of things and sentences. The whole training will be natural, responsive and therefore the quickest and the cheapest in the land. The children of my school will therefore read much more quickly than they will write. And when they write, they will not produce daubs as I do even now, (thanks to my teachers) but they will trace correct letters even as they will trace correct figures of the objects they may see. If the schools of my conception ever come into being, I may make bold to say, that they will vie with the most advanced schools in quickness as far as reading is concerned and even writing if it is common ground, that writing must be correct and not incorrect as it is now in the vast majority of cases.'"¹⁴

The above illustration clears everyone of the misconception that he did not include literacy in his scheme of education. Thus it is obvious that Gandhi aims at perfection in education, be it either drawing, handwriting, reading or writing, whatever it may be.

SECTION IV

The Evolution of Gandhi's Theory of Education

Gandhi's ideas in regard to education, did not, of course, suddenly emerge from his brain. They have been the outcome of long years of sustained thought and experience. It has evolved out of his long and wide experience of the political, social and economic life of his country and that of his countrymen in South Africa.

After a long drawn out process of various kinds of experience and experiments, conducted for nearly forty years, in both South Africa and in India, his (Gandhiji's) views on education took their final shape and developed into a philosophy of education. It is the final shape of his philosophy of education that entitles him to world-wide renown as a great educationist and as one who has made a revolutionary contribution to educational thought.

Even at an early age, Gandhi realized the evils of the prevailing system of education in India, since his own early education had been imperfect in many ways. Therefore, while he was in South Africa he began to make some reforms in the education of his own children, and later began to apply them to other children as well, who gathered round him in the Phoenix Settlement, Tolstoy Farm and Sabarmati Ashram etc. Even in his early days, Gandhi held the view that the field of education was something vast, in which there was too much

of make-believe, self-deception and blind submission to convention. He wanted to break through the old rut and strike a new path, based on personal experience and experiment.

That is why he rightly maintains, "The field of education which holds the seeds of the future of the children of the soil requires absolute sincerity, fearlessness in the pursuit of truth and boldest experiments, provided always they are sound and based upon deep thought, matured and sanctified by a life of consecration. Not every tyro in education may make such experiments. If the field is vast enough for vast experimenting, it is too dangerous for hasty and ill-conceived prospecting such as people in feverish search of gold delight in."¹

Gandhi sounds a note of warning, for experimenters in education to be always slow and cautious and not be hasty. In spite of the best results of his experiments, he never claims any degree of perfection, for his experiments, nor any finality about his conclusions, but he keeps an open mind regarding them.

However much his experiments may be characterised by qualities of accuracy, forethought and minuteness, he does not claim his results to be infallible. Whatever appeared to be absolutely correct for him, seemed for the time being to be final ; for if they were not, he based no action on them. But at every step, he carried out the scientific process of acceptance or rejection and acted accordingly. He has gone through deep self-introspection, searched himself through and through and examined and analysed every psychological situation. So long as his acts satisfied his reason

1. Page 11, *Towards New Education*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1953.

and his heart, he held that he should adhere firmly to his original conclusions. That is the way in which he has made his experiments in education in the true spirit of a scientist, carrying convictions of his own conscience. In his method of approach, the sovereign principle has always been truth underlying numerous other principles. Therefore the experiments which he conducted on a small-scale may be regarded as wonderful illustrations in the light of which every educationist can carry on his own experiments according to his own design of mind, inclinations and capacity.

The educational theory of Gandhi evolved against a background of the glaring defects of the educational system prevalent in India—a system of education that divorced the child from his physical and social surroundings wherein exclusive emphasis was laid on purely literary education, to the neglect of the culture of the heart. The other glaring defects of the then existing system of education have been the neglect of mass education and the wastage and ineffectiveness of the educational system, which ill-suited the genius of the people of the country.

Innumerable illustrations of the defects of foreign education in India could be given and they thrust themselves on his attention. Evidently it became all the more clear to him that the whole system of education was rotten to the core and therefore it stood in need of a complete reform.

Thus, Gandhi's theory of education, which is the outcome of his various experiments in South Africa and India, had the scientific object of satisfying the primary or basic needs of the country. The conclusions arrived at are borne out by his own experience and experiments conducted and carried out by himself and not second-hand. Gandhi has

always been primarily a man of action and then only an idealist in any sphere of his life, not to speak of matters educational. Therefore, his theory of education has been, by and large, objective rather than subjective and experimental rather than speculative, dominated by the attitude and aim of a scientist. Gandhi's theory of education is not different from practice in any particular, since it has been the result of his long practice, its conclusions have been tested and verified in its applications by himself. Both theory and practice have been found to be present at all stages of his educational development, practice correcting theory, and theory improving practice. The dictum that any theory is always a critical examination of the experience gained in practice and in its turn submits its findings to the test of practice is too true in the case of Mahatma Gandhi.

The present analysis will testify to the kind of steps his evolutionary process has taken. The first phase relates to the earlier formative period in his life when he revolted against the prevailing system of education and sought in various ways to substitute it by educational practices more in harmony with his own conception of the function of education. In the beginning, he tried his experiments in his own home in the education of his own children. It was his experiments in this direction which made him a great teacher and a great educationist later on. He rightly observes in his autobiography: "I very much liked the company of children and the habit of playing and joking with them has stayed with me today. I have ever since thought that I should make a teacher of children."² The above illustration shows that his love of children, has since his early life, inspired in him the ideal that he should be a good teacher of

2. Page 112 *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments With Truth*—M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1946.

children. Even before he undertook the educational reform of his own sons, soon after his return from England and immediately after qualifying himself for the Bar, he has been interested in making several kinds of educational experiments *i.e.* educating his illiterate wife, his incompetent cook and several others. This interest sustained him throughout, not only in his home for his own children, but gradually extended in its scope, at the Phoenix Settlement and at the Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, where he began to apply the principles practised at home in the education of his children, improving upon it accordingly and trying it subsequently. Deeply reflecting upon the experience thus gained, he began to repeat the same process after his return to India at the Satyagraha Ashrama and Sabarmati Ashram. This relates to the second phase of his evolutionary process—period of experimentation. More of it later on—a detailed account of his experiments is given separately in subsequent pages. The third phase of his evolutionary process relates to the formulation of his principles of education.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the periods of his revolt and experimentation and formulation of principles are by any means rigid, having watertight compartments, with no connection whatsoever between the three. Far from it, even in his period of revolt and experimentation, it is not difficult to obtain glimpses of Gandhi formulating his principles of education. Nevertheless, it is hoped, that such an analysis of the evolutionary process his theory of education has taken, will help one to provide a clearer understanding of the development of his ideas. Thus, it seems that Gandhi's educational theory and practice have long been integrated as a whole until he was definitely in a position to perfect them in 1937 when he launched his new scheme of education—

Nai Talim or his method of Basic Education and shaped it into a very coherent and consistent philosophy of education acceptable to all. Therefore, it is essential to go back to his earlier period where one can see his educational ideas in its origin and growth, in order to understand adequately his new scheme of education by which he is generally acknowledged as one who has made a revolutionary contribution to educational thought.

In evolving his philosophy of education, he has been greatly influenced by three great personalities who have left a deep impress upon his life : Ray Chandbai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book. 'The Kingdom of God is Within You' and Ruskin by his 'Unto His Last'. Ray Chandbai was a seeker after truth, even though a businessman and his influence was very great in moulding Gandhi's philosophy of truth and *ahimsa*. He sought refuge in Ray Chandbai in his moments of spiritual crisis. The other influence of inestimable value that exerted on the plastic mind of Gandhi was that of Tolstoy and his teachings. Tolstoy's Gospel of Love became acceptable to Gandhi and soon he began to realise the infinite possibilities of universal love. It was in the teachings of Tolstoy that Gandhi perceived the ideas that education without the use of one's hands and feet would atrophy the brains. Another great person who exercised the most profound influence on the life and philosophy of Gandhi was Ruskin. His 'Unto His Last' gripped Gandhi's mind so much that he determined to change his life in accordance with the ideals of the book. It brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in his life. To his great satisfaction he discovered some of his deepest convictions reflected in that book of Ruskin and that was why it captured him so much and made him transform his life in accordance with Ruskin's ideals. He understood the essence of the

teachings of 'Unto His Last' to be :

“(1) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.

(2) That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.

(3) That a life of labour *i.e.*, the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.”³

Thus, the mind of Gandhi, after having been exposed to the formative influences of Ray Chandra-bai, in the matter of religion and that of Tolstoy in the matter of the educational value of manual labour, his educational theory begins to take a definite shape and settle down to a definite line of thought. Therefore, in the evolution of his educational theory one can find that his initial inspiration has been drawn from the above-mentioned three great personalities and their teachings. The foundation of his philosophy of education, can, at this stage be as well thought to have been laid, while the details of the superstructure may be settled later in the light of the mature experience gained from his various experiments and observations.

SECTION V

Gandhi's Educational Experiments

During his stay in South Africa for a considerable portion of his life, Gandhi was in a position to know the innumerable hardships of native Indians settled in South Africa. He knew full well that they were exploited because of their ignorance. Moved by sympathy towards them, he started on a new venture, which in the long-run proved more or less an eye-opener to the native Indian settlers in South Africa. What was the new venture? He started a class to teach English to a handful of Indians—three at the beginning. He had no misgivings regarding his capacity to teach. At the outset he undertook to teach English to three persons—two of them were Mussalmans—one a barber, another a clerk, and the third was a Hindu, a petty shop-keeper. Being more interested in social education, during his stay in Pretoria, in South Africa, he made a deep study of the social, economic and political conditions of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The hard conditions of the Indian settlers deepened his feeling for them and it gave him opportunities of learning public work and its importance. Here it was that the religious spirit within him became a true living force.

In the matter of religion he was greatly influenced by Ray Chandbai by his living contact, Tolstoy's 'The Kingdom of God is Within You' and Ruskin's 'Unto His Last', and the other important factors were his comparative knowledge of the various religions, drawn from the Bible, the

Koran, the Bhagavat Gita, the Ramayana of Tulsidas and Edwin Arnold's 'Light of Asia.' Gandhi acknowledges his indebtedness to the above references in his autobiography. All the above mentioned seem to have awakened in him a religious quest—a quest for spiritual development and perfection which in its onward movement led him in the direction of making educational experiments as one of the means of attaining his cherished goal.

The Natal Indian Congress, which was a creation of Gandhi, had one interesting feature even in those days—service of colonial-born educated Indians. In such activities he took keen interest. The Gospel of Love enthused in him a spirit of service of the poor which has been his heart's desire and it has always thrown him amongst the poor and enabled him to identify himself with them. It was only during his stay in South Africa, during his days of selfless service for the suffering Indian settlers, he realised the true concept of religion—the religion of service, which behind it had the desire for self-realisation, realising God through service. Even though he had gone to South Africa in 1893 with the specific purpose of gaining his own livelihood, he found himself in search of God and striving for self-realisation. It was while he was in South Africa, he found the necessity for a comparative study of religions.

On his return from South Africa to India in 1896 Gandhi found plague being wide in Bombay and Rajkot. He immediately volunteered his services in the sanitation department of the State and took keen interest in hygiene and nursing the sick. When social service is nowadays becoming a regular feature in the programme of schools and colleges, one has to take a leaf from the life of Gandhi in regard to the spirit in which social service is to be

undertaken by the students. Gandhi aptly remarks: "Such service can have no meaning unless one takes pleasure in it. When it is done for show or for fear of public opinion, it stunts the man and crushes his spirit. Service which is rendered without joy, helps neither the servant nor the served. But all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy."¹

It was against such a background of his rich experience and knowledge of men and things, that he began to make his own experiments in education, which were more or less Experiments with Truth, in his opinion.

Soon after his return from India, back to Durban, in South Africa in 1897, Gandhi was primarily faced with the problem of educating his own children. He made up his mind not to send them to the schools meant for European children, since he did not like the education imparted in those schools—especially the English medium, he would not approve. He made his own attempt to teach them through Gujarati, (strictly) their mother-tongue. He was unwilling to send his children back to India, since he believed even then, that young children should not be separated from their parents. He believed that the disciplinary value of a good education in a well-ordered household was of far more significance than that could be obtained in a regular school. Therefore, he observes: "The education that children naturally imbibe in a well-ordered household is impossible to obtain in hostels. I therefore kept my children with me."² Throughout, his children never went to any regular school but all the education they obtained was from him both at home and outside during his active life

1. Page 215, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1945.

2. Page 243, *Ibid.*

in South Africa. Only his eldest son, who broke away from him, went to India, to join a High school in Ahmedabad but that too was not for a long time. The other three of his sons had never been at a public school, though they did get some kind of regular schooling in an improvised school which he himself started for the children of Satyagrahi parents in South Africa. Not that Gandhi was against any kind of literary education being given his sons, but he did not have enough time to devote to his children's education as he wanted to give them. His dislike was for a kind of education which was purely literary and thereby academic, with no practical bias, introducing a gulf of separation between the educated few on the one hand and the illiterate masses on the other.

Gandhi firmly believed that children could get good discipline and training only at the school of experience or from constant contact with the parents.

Therefore, he did not feel sorry for not having given his children an artificial education which they could have had in England or in South Africa, if only he had a mind, but he was sure that such an education would never have taught them the simplicity and the spirit of service which they showed in their lives. Thus, Gandhi was keenly aware of some measure of the difference that would prevail between disciplined home education and ordinary school education and also of the effects produced on children through changes introduced by parents in their lives. He observes: "Had I been without a sense of self-respect and satisfied myself with having for my children, the education, that other children could not get, I should have deprived them of the object-lesson in liberty and self-respect that I gave them at the cost of the literary training. And where a

choice has to be made between liberty and learning, who will not say that the former has to be preferred a thousand times to the latter.”³ The above illustrates how greatly he prized liberty more than mere learning of an academic nature. The non-cooperation movement which was called by Gandhi in 1920 had seeds of great educational significance for the Indians. It was only because that the youths were called out from their schools and colleges to fight for India's freedom, considering liberty to be of greater significance than that of obtaining a mere literary education, that India has been now able to enjoy greater freedom, freedom from the bondages of western domination, which has been impoverishing the spirit of India, that is freedom of thought and mind in her noble aspirations. Gandhi's own words would best explain this. “The youths whom I called out in 1920 from those citadels of slavery—their schools and colleges—and whom I advised that it was far better to remain unlettered and break stones for the sake of liberty than to go in for a literary education in the chains of slaves will probably be able now to trace my advice to its source,”⁴ The above shows how all along Gandhi has been aiming at education for freedom. Thus, the political emancipation of India was Gandhi's heart's desire and therefore he aimed at education for freedom for the Indian children.

Since his early days, Gandhi took special interest in nursing. During his school days he had to attend upon his sick father. Later, he took upon himself the responsibility of upbringing his own children for which he read a good deal to acquire a knowledge of the care and nursing of babies. In these days, when Home Science, Home Eco-

3. Page 248, *Ibid.*

4. Page 248, *Ibid.*

nomics and Home Nursing are becoming popular it is no wonder that Gandhi has anticipated the need for study of such subjects, even as early as the close of the nineteenth century.

In this connection it is worth quoting Gandhi's few observations which run as follows: "I am convinced that for the proper upbringing of children, the parents ought to have a general knowledge of the care and nursing of babies. At every step I have seen the advantages of my careful study of the subject."⁵ He attributes the good general health which his sons enjoyed to his studies regarding the care and nursing of babies and having turned them to good account.

Both in South Africa and in England, the living conditions seemed to him to be quite unhealthy and artificial. After long introspection, he was convinced of the need for introducing simplicity in his way of living. Naturally, later his wide and varied experiences of the political, social and economic conditions of life of the people in South Africa and in India, gave him an insight into the problem and he began to develop a passion for self-help and simplicity in extreme form. He ultimately expressed his ideas of self-help and simplicity which was his philosophy of life in matters educational of which Basic Education is a noble example. In a way, it may be considered that the seeds of his ideas of future Educational Reconstruction of India along lines of self-help and simplicity, were sown and broadcast even while he was in South Africa.

In the preceding paragraphs casual references have been made to a few of the different kinds of general educational experiments of Gandhi which were not

in any way systematic. But the year 1904 marks an important stage in the history of his educational experiments. It was in that year Gandhi began to make a bold educational venture—embarked upon an undertaking which had great educational significance.

The Phoenix Settlement

The Phoenix Settlement, which Gandhi started in 1904 in South Africa, became later on a place of great educational importance. It was two and a half miles from Phoenix station and fourteen miles from Durban. It was there, that Gandhi began to translate into practice his philosophy of education. The Phoenix Settlement was originally meant for running the "Indian Opinion", a publication of which Gandhi was the editor. But gradually a number of Satyagrahis swarmed up to Gandhi's cottage with their families to live a life along the ideals of Gandhi. The children in the settlement numbered about thirty. They received not only literary training but also practical instruction on agriculture and printing. They were expected to live among clean surroundings, spending the whole day on their studies and physical labour—engaging themselves either in cooking, gardening or in some other constructive work. Thus, besides his home wherein he tried to keep up an ideal atmosphere, the Phoenix Settlement also proved to be an ideal school-cum-workshop, wherein both the theory and practice of learning could go hand in hand. It was at this time that Gandhi prepared the seeds of his future educational reconstruction of India. It was here, where he formed his ideas of education which were later on to blossom into perfection.

Apart from the Phoenix Settlement, the home atmosphere of Gandhi was such that it partook

more or less the nature of a centre of education of an ideal type. When Gandhi was in Johannesburg, he introduced as much simplicity as could be possible in his household. He was not indifferent to the literary education of his children but he did not hesitate to sacrifice it to service to the community. He considered that proper training in character should be given by the parents at home. That training he believed, could be given only by ideal parents whose ways of doing and thinking would be reflected in the children. He also tried to instruct his children by conversation during his walks. He talked to his children only in Gujarati, since it was his conviction that those Indian parents who trained their children to think and talk in English from their infancy betrayed their children and their country. He believed that "they deprived them of the spiritual and social heritage of the nation and rendered them to that extent unfit for the service of the country."⁶

Gandhi was in a fair measure, able to assess the value of giving the children an education in their mother-tongue, because of his own experiments made upon his children. Pointing out the advantages of such an education, he observes: "Though my sons have suffered for want of full literary education, the knowledge of the mother-tongue that they naturally acquired has been all to their and the country's good, in as much as they do not appear the foreigners they would otherwise have appeared. They naturally became bilingual, speaking and writing English with fair ease, because of contact with a large circle of English friends and because of their stay in a country where English was the chief language spoken."⁷

6. Page 381, *Ibid.*

7. Page 381—382, *Ibid.*

The Tolstoy Farm

In 1911, Gandhi started an *ashram* in the Transvaal with the help and guidance of Hermann Kallenbach, a German co-worker and called it 'Tolstoy Farm' after the Russian saint, Count Leo Tolstoy. Here, people belonging to various religions lived together as a corporate body. There were among these, Hindu, Mussalman, Parsi and Christian boys and some Hindu girls also. As the Tolstoy Farm grew in course of time, Gandhi found it necessary to make provision for the education of its boys and girls. But somehow or other, he did not feel inclined to continue the then existing system of education, in which he had little faith. Prompted by an inner urge, he wanted to embark on a voyage of exploration and discovery in the field of education and find out by experiment the true system of education. He would not import teachers from outside, since he believed firmly that only parents could impart true education to their children. He declared, "Only this much I knew—that under ideal conditions, true education could be imparted only by the parents and that then there should be the minimum of outside help, that Tolstoy Farm was a family, in which I occupied the place of the father, and that I should so far as possible shoulder the responsibility for the training of the young."⁸ The above system closely resembles the family life that Tagore tried to maintain in Viswabharathi, wherein every house has a house 'father' and a house 'mother' for boys and girls separately and life is lived as a family group by the students along with the teachers.

The boys and girls at Tolstoy Farm not only belonged to various religions but they were all brought up in different conditions and environment.

At Tolstoy Farm, Gandhi assumed the place of *pater familias* for those children. The Tolstoy Farm had its own peculiar features which entitled it to great renown. In fact it proved to be an ideal laboratory for his educational experiments. Here, he attached as always, the greatest importance to culture of the heart, character-building in education. He gave the first place to the culture of the heart and felt confident that moral training could be given to every one alike, irrespective of their ages and upbringing. He also decided to live amongst them all throughout the day as their father so that they could feel the real home atmosphere there.

He attached more importance to character than anything else and therefore he remarked, "I regarded character-building as the proper foundation for their education, and, if the foundation was firmly laid, I was sure that the children could learn all the other things themselves or with the assistance of friends."⁹

Gandhi appreciated the necessity of a literary training in the education of the children of the Tolstoy Farm and therefore he started some classes with the help of Mr. Kallenbach and others. He did not underrate the importance of physical culture of the children. This they automatically got in the course of their daily routine—since there were no servants on the Farm, all kinds of work, from cooking down to scavenging had to be done by the inmates. There were many fruit trees to be looked after and enough gardening to be done. Those who had no work in the kitchen had to learn gardening. The children gained some experience in digging pits, felling timber and lifting loads which gave them ample exercise and they naturally built up fine physiques. There was no incidence of any illness—good air and water and regular hours of food were not a little responsible for this.

Thus the distinguishing features of Tolstoy Farm were the primary importance attached to culture of the heart and body—building and last but not least vocational training. The youngsters were taught some useful and manual vocation like shoe-making, carpentry and cooking, etc. Mr. Kallenbach went to a Traffist monastery and returned having learnt shoe-making. He also knew carpentry. Gandhi learnt it from him and taught them in turn besides the three R's to the children. The teachers at the Farm were always expected to set an example to others by their own conduct and they were always ready to co-operate with the students, so that learning could become a joyous adventure. Gandhi himself describes the special features of the Tolstoy Farm thus : "On Tolstoy Farm we made it a rule that the youngsters should not be asked to do what the teachers did not do and, therefore, when they were asked to do any work, there was always a teacher co-operating and actually working with them. Hence whatever the youngsters learnt, they learnt cheerfully."¹⁰ Gandhi's description of the Tolstoy Farm shows how the teachers there set an example to others by their ideal conduct and practices—they practised before they preached and did not preach what they did not practice.

At the Tolstoy Farm, Gandhi gave three periods at the most to literary training. Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati were all taught and tuition was given through the vernaculars of the boys. English was also taught as well as Sanskrit to the Gujarati, Hindu children. All the children were taught elementary history, geography and arithmetic as well. Gandhi himself undertook the teaching of Tamil and Urdu to the children, even though his knowledge of it was imperfect. Recognizing the many limitations under

which the educational experiment at Tolstoy Farm was carried out, he remarks : "Such was the capital with which I had to carry on. In poverty of literary equipment, my colleagues went on better than I. But my love for the language of my country, my confidence in my capacity as a teacher, as also the ignorance of my pupils and more than that, their generosity stood me in good stead."¹¹ In spite of his own limitations, Gandhi was able to get along merrily, because he never attempted to disguise his ignorance from his pupils. Even as a teacher, Gandhi aimed at truth, never concealing his ignorance, never a man of pretensions. It is known that in all respects he showed himself to them exactly as he really was. Therefore in spite of his colossal ignorance of the languages, he never lost their love and respect. Even though the youngsters were for the most part unlettered and unschooled, he would pull on with boys of different ages learning different subjects in one and the same class.

In the course of teaching several subjects, Gandhi never felt the want of text-books at all, without which he was easily able to carry on. According to him the true text-book for the pupil was the teacher and therefore, he never found it necessary to load the minds of children with a number of text-books. Gandhi so aptly puts it thus : "Of text-books about which we hear so much, I never felt the want. I do not even remember having made much use of the books that were available. I did not find it at all necessary to load the boys with quantities of books. I have always felt that the true text-book for the pupil is his teacher."¹² He further adds : "I remember very little that my teacher taught me from books

11. Page 411, *Ibid.*

12. Page 411 - 412, *Ibid.*

but I have even now a clear recollection of the things they taught me independently of the books."¹³

Gandhi's approach to problems of education has been thoroughly psychological. In teaching, he never used to read the book through from cover to cover but gave them a short account of all that he had read in his own language which was much more easily understood by the children and even remembered than what was read by them. By putting them questions and eliciting answers from them, he was able to measure their power of understanding. Hence, he always considered book-learning to be laborious but listening a pleasure for the children. Gandhi himself thus describes his method of teaching: "Children take in much more and with less labour through their ears than through their eyes. I do not remember having read any book from cover to cover with my boys. But I gave them in my own language all that I had digested from my reading of various books and I dare say that they are still carrying a recollection of it in their minds."¹⁴ He further explains: "It was laborious for them to remember what they learnt from books, but what I imparted to them from books by word of mouth, they could repeat with the greatest ease. Reading was a task for them, but listening to me was a pleasure, when I did not bore them by failure to make my subject interesting. And from the questions that my talks prompted them to put, I had a measure of their power of understanding."¹⁵ The above clearly illustrates Gandhi's wonderful power of understanding of the psychology of child learning--that the process of learning should as far as possible be

13. Page 412, *Ibid.*

14. Page 412, *Ibid.*

15. Page 412, *Ibid.*

a pleasurable one and not laborious and that greater learning takes place when teaching is made interesting so that listening can become a pleasure and not a task of an unpleasant nature.

At Tolstoy Farm the boys got physical, mental and spiritual training. Gandhi considered spiritual training to be a very essential part of the education of the children in his charge. For him to develop, the spirit was to develop character and to enable one to work towards a knowledge of God and self-realisation. All other training in which the development of the spirit did not form a part, was not only useless, but might be even harmful. Long before he undertook the education of the youngsters of the Tolstoy Farm, he had keenly realised the importance of spiritual training—that the training of the spirit, was a thing by itself. For the training of the spirit he relied little on the religious books but he believed that every student should be acquainted with the elements of his own religion and he should have a general knowledge of his own Scriptures. Gandhi provided for his children such knowledge as best as he could.

Gandhi fully realised the futility of books in the training of the spirit. He believed that just as physical training was to be given through physical exercises and intellectual training through exercise of the intellect, so also spiritual training was to be given only through the exercise of the spirit. According to him the exercise of the spirit would entirely depend on the life and character of the teacher. In the matter of moral training of the boys, he wants the teachers to be always cautious of their own wrong-doing, whether it be in the class or outside. He expects the teachers to be absolutely perfect and ideal in their conduct and character before their undertaking the huge task of imparting moral training to others. Teachers of moral and spiritual training

should be primarily men of integrity or character and self-restraint and be an eternal object-lesson to the boys and girls living with them. Gandhi proved to be such an ideal teacher possessing all the virtues enumerated above and therefore he was largely able to affect the spirit of his pupils by his way of living which was exemplary in its character—plain living and high thinking. He points out the true method by which a teacher could impart spiritual training when he says: "It is possible for a teacher living miles away to affect the spirit of the pupils by his way of living. It would be idle for me, if I were a liar, to teach boys to tell the truth. A cowardly teacher would never succeed in making his boys valiant and a stranger to self-restraint could never teach his pupils the value of self-restraint."¹⁶

The philosophy of non-violence or *ahimsa* which Gandhi followed in the political sphere of his life finds its echo in his philosophy of education also. By his opposition to corporal punishment he stresses the importance of *ahimsa* in education. Even though instances of misconduct happened in Tolstoy Farm, he doubted very much whether the violent method of corporal punishment would have availed on the occasion. On one occasion a particular boy who was wild, unruly, given to lying and quarrelsome broke out most violently and therefore, Gandhi who never punished his boys, had of necessity to have recourse to corporal punishment. He picked up a ruler lying at hand and struck a blow on the arm of the boy who misbehaved. The culprit later cried out and begged to be forgiven not because the blow was painful to him but he realized Gandhi's pain in having been driven to such a violent step. Never again did the boy disobey him nor did Gandhi ever

resort to corporal punishment in his life. Conscious of his own wrong Gandhi repented for his violence and admitted the mistake on his part for having exhibited before the boy that day, not the spirit, but the brute in him. That is why, he says: "I have always been opposed to corporal punishment."¹⁷ Thus in his earnest efforts to give spiritual training to the boys and girls under his charge, he came to increasingly understand the power of the spirit—a better method of correcting the students involved in cases of misconduct.

It is not to be inferred from the above, that because Gandhi did not resort to corporal punishment, cases of misconduct on the part of the boys never occurred at all after this instance. Far from it some of the boys at the Farm were bad and unruly. There were loafers also amongst them. With them, Gandhi's three boys also came in daily contact as also did other children of the same type as his own sons. This troubled Mr. Kallenbach very much. Since he could not approve of the idea of Gandhi in that respect—what pained him much was the impropriety of Gandhi in keeping his boys with those unruly youngsters. Mr. Kallenbach rather thought that Gandhi's boys would be demoralised in such bad company. Gandhi was not puzzled at all at the question but remained calm and unperturbed and maintained that the association of his boys with other boys would be a good discipline for them. Gandhi believed that when good and bad children were brought up and taught together, they (the good) would lose nothing since if there was anything really good, it was bound to react on their companions. He considered it a good discipline for the good children to be taught together along with the bad ones, and thrown into their company, provided the experiment was con-

ducted under the watchful care of their parents and guardians. He did not want to put a sense of superiority into the heads of his sons by keeping them away and aloof from the company of bad boys. In fact what Gandhi thought was that they would of their own accord learn to discriminate between good and evil in course of time.

The above experiment convinced him that the result of it was not bad. He did not consider that his sons were any the worse for the experiment. On the contrary, he could see that his sons gained something. If at all there was the slightest trace of superiority in them it was destroyed and as a result they learnt to mix freely with all kinds of children-socialization. In fact, as a result of his experiment, they were tested and disciplined. This and similar other experiments have led him to believe that "Children wrapped up in cotton wool are not always proof against all temptation or contamination. It is true, however, that, when boys and girls of all kinds of upbringing are kept and taught together, the parents and teachers are put to the severest test. They have constantly to be on the alert."¹⁸ Thus, it is obvious, that Gandhi does not want parents to be upset if their children happened to be kept and taught together along with some bad children. He believes that it by itself will be some kind of a discipline for the good boys and anything good in them is bound to react on their companions. At the same time, he wants the teachers and parents and guardians to be always on the alert.

In spite of his best efforts Gandhi found it difficult to bring up and educate the boys and girls under his custody in the right way. He realized that if he was to prove to be their real teacher and guardian, he must necessarily touch

their hearts. How was that to be done ? He must help them to solve the problems that faced them ; share their joys and sorrows and take along the right channel their surging youthful aspirations. After the release of some of the satyagrahis from jail, Tolstoy Farm was almost denuded of its inmates. The few that remained mostly belonged to Phoenix. So he removed them there. Due to his pressing political engagements, Gandhi had finally to disband the colony after the political settlement was reached. This left him little time to conduct the experiment on a satisfactory scale for a long enough period.

At the conclusion of the Satyagraha struggle in South Africa in 1914, Gandhi received Gokhale's instruction to return home *via* London. So he sailed for England. On his arrival in England, he found that England was preparing herself for a war. Gandhi volunteered to tender his services to the Empire at that critical hour. He underwent the preliminary training in First Aid, covering a short course of six weeks. He was given military drill and other training along with others, numbering eighty. There were no doubt many who questioned the consistency of his action with his profession of *ahimsa*. Gandhi's contention was that, "When two nations are fighting, the duty of a votary of *ahimsa* is to stop the war. He who is not equal to the duty, he who has no power of resisting war, he who is not qualified to resist war, may take part in war, yet wholeheartedly try to free himself, his nation and the world from war."¹⁹ Whether he was right or wrong in having offered his services in the war is a question on which both could be said. Being a devotee of Truth, he always held himself open to correction when he discovered himself to be wrong and confessed it at all

costs and atoned for it. But regarding the propriety of his action he had his own convictions. He served in the war for some time as Chairman of the Volunteer Corps but soon a hitch arose and he had to keep away.

At Shantiniketan

Soon after his return to India from England towards the end of 1914, a new phase of his life commenced. He had been convinced even earlier of the futility of foreign education, which was not only wasteful but also harmful. Before he reached home, the special party which had started from Phoenix had already arrived. In fact Gandhi ought to have preceded them but due to his preoccupation with the war (in England) he had to be detained in England indefinitely. He was faced with the question of finding a suitable place for accommodating the Phoenix party. It was his ambition that they all should stay together in India and if possible, try to live the life they had led at Phoenix. On the advice of Andrews the Phoenix party were put in the Shantiniketan Ashram of Rabindranath Tagore, where the poet and his people showered love upon them. Gandhi also joined the party at Shantiniketan where within a day of their arrival his people made them feel so thoroughly at home that they did not seem to miss Phoenix at all. The experiences that Gandhi had at Shantiniketan stood him in good stead later on. The Phoenix family had been assigned separate quarters at Shantiniketan. Maganlal Gandhi, the leader of the party, made it a point to see that all the rules of the Phoenix Ashram were scrupulously observed.

At Shantiniketan the influence of Gandhi was keenly felt by everybody in matters educational by his way of life. He quickly mixed with the teachers and students and engaged them in a lively

discussion on self-help. He put it to the teachers that if they and the boys dispensed with the services of paid cooks and cooked their food themselves, it would enable the teachers to control the kitchen from the point of the boys' physical and moral health and it would give the students an object-lesson in self-help. The boys welcomed it because of an instinctive taste for novelty. Since the teachers were also not opposed to the idea, Gandhi launched the experiment, commenting that it contained the key to Swaraj. All alike took the thing up with great zest and Shantiniketan became a busy hive. Not only was the Phoenix party's kitchen self-conducted but the food cooked in it was the simplest. Condiments were eschewed and rice, dal and vegetables and wheat flour were all cooked at one and the same time in a steam cooker. By way of enthusiasm the Shantiniketan boys started a similar kitchen with a view to introducing reform in the Bengali kitchen. One or two teachers and some students ran the model kitchen. The experiment conducted as a demonstration lesson in self-help by Gandhi and other members of the Phoenix party, was however, dropped after some time. But yet, Gandhi held the view that the famous institution of Tagore lost nothing by having conducted the experiment for only a brief interval. Some of the experiences gained in the course of conducting the experiment Gandhi contended, could not but be of help to the teachers at least. Even now, Gandhi's experiment is worth being copied in all schools and colleges where residential facilities exist for the teachers and the students.

The Satyagraha Ashrama

It was founded on May 25, 1915 at Kochrab, Ahmedabad, and since removed to Sabarmati, a junction station near Ahmedabad. The object of this Ashrama was that its members should

qualify themselves for, and make a constant endeavour towards, the service of the country, not inconsistent with the universal welfare. The philosophy or the ideal behind it was devotion to truth and the main business of the ashramites was the search for and insistence on truth. Since Gandhi believed in system, he found it necessary to frame a code of rules and regulations for the conduct of the ashramities. A draft was accordingly prepared and the following observances were considered essential for the fulfilment of the above object : Truth ; Non-violence or Love ; Chastity ; Control of the palate ; Non-stealing ; Non-possession or Poverty ; Physical labour ; Swadeshi ; Fearlessness ; Removal of untouchability ; and Tolerance. As a result of and in order to help fulfilment of these observances, the following activities were carried out in the Ashrama : Worship ; Sanitary service ; Sacrificial spinning ; Agriculture ; Dairy ; Tannery ; and National education.

Selflessness was insisted upon the members, since service without humility would be selfishness and egotism. There were at that time thirteen Tamilians. Five of them had accompanied him from South Africa and the rest came from different parts of the country. In all, there were about twenty-five men and women in the Ashrama. That was how the Ashrama was started at Ahmedabad. Being a Gujarati he thought that he would be able to render the greatest service to the country through the Gujarati language. Further, as Ahmedabad was an ancient centre of handloom weaving, he thought it was likely to be the most favourable field for the revival of the cottage industry of hand-spinning. There was also the hope that the city being the then capital of Gujarat, monetary help would be forthcoming from its wealthy citizens there than elsewhere.

The Satyagraha Ashrama proved to be really an experiment in social education wherein differences of caste, creed and religion were completely forgotten and life was lived on terms of equality, allowing no room for development of complexes in the individuals. Gandhi was seriously concerned with the great social evil in India, namely, untouchability, which has been the canker of Indian society, building up divisions of an artificial nature among the individuals. Therefore Gandhi was interested in giving the ashramites a good and sound training in social education which will be national in character. He made it a point of admitting any untouchable candidate as an inmate of the ashrama if he was otherwise worthy. Therefore, in the very beginning he proclaimed to the world that the Ashrama would not countenance untouchability. Thus the Satyagraha Ashrama of Gandhi has proved to be a wonderful educational experiment in social relationship. Even though there was stout opposition from outside when the untouchables were admitted into the Ashrama, Gandhi was not perturbed but maintained his determination to welcome anybody, whoever it may be, on the basis of his or her worthiness.

At the Satyagraha Ashrama, Gandhi made an attempt to impart such education as will be conducive to national welfare. In order that spiritual, intellectual and physical development might proceed side by side, he tried his best to create an atmosphere of industry. The letters were not given more than their due importance. Character building was attended to in the smallest detail. Women were given special attention with a view to improving their status and they were accorded the same opportunities for self-culture as the men. The language of the province had the principal place in the Ashrama and was the medium of instruction.

Languages other than Gujarati were taught by direct method. The fundamental principles of the Ashrama were the same as those of the Gujarati Vidyapith, which was founded by Gandhi himself. Thus, Gandhi's experiment at the Satyagraha Ashrama proved to be a wonderful attempt in National Education.

Sabarmati Ashrama

Gandhi's ideal was to have the Ashrama at a safe distance from town and village and yet at a manageable distance from either. Originally the Ashrama was in Kochrab, a small village near Ahmedabad. The plague that broke out in the village became one of the reasons for shifting that Ashrama to a desirable place, where there would be no danger to the safety of the Ashrama children.

The plague gave sufficient notice to quit Kochrab. Naturally, Gandhi had to go in for a suitable site for the Ashrama.

In a few days, he selected a place very near the Sabarmati Central Jail. It had a special attraction for him. He generally liked clean surroundings. Since Sabarmati was situated on the bank of a river its solitude fascinated him very much. Even in the matter of selecting a proper site, Gandhi has been largely influenced by the philosophy of Naturalism inherent in his educational system.

The Sabarmati Ashrama has been slowly growing. There were then over fifty souls, men, women and children, all having their meals at a common kitchen and they strove to live as one family. The life of the ashramites had the semblance of a camp life, wherein everything had to be improvised. They had to learn everything by surprises of achievement.

They decided to start by living under a canvas and having a tin shed for a kitchen till permanent houses were built. Their difficulties before getting permanent living accommodation were great. Due to the impending rains, provisions had to be got from the city four miles away. The ground which had been a waste was infested with snakes and it was no small risk to live with little children under such exceeding conditions. However, Gandhi insisted on the general principle of non-violence—philosophy of not killing venomous reptiles by all the inmates. The rule of not killing the reptiles has been practised for the most part at Phoenix, Tolstoy Farm and Sabarmati. Tagore has also followed a similar policy of non-violence in his ashrama at Vishwabharti—*ahimsa* in education.

The principal activity of the Sabarmati Ashrama was then weaving.

At Champaran

In the year 1917 the problems of the indigo plantation labourers of Champaran seriously engaged his attention. He threw himself heart and soul in being of service to the Champaran agriculturalists by inquiring into their conditions and understanding their grievances against the indigo planters. As he gained more experience, he became convinced that work of a permanent nature was impossible without proper village education. The pathetic ignorance of the ryots impressed upon him the necessity for educating them properly, so that they might not allow themselves to be exploited by others. The economic conditions of the indigo labourers were such that they either allowed their children to roam about, or made them toil on indigo plantations from morning to night for a couple of coppers a day. Since the philosophy of Humanism was dominant in his educational ideas

he was moved by sympathy towards them and therefore, decided, in consultation with his companions, to open primary schools in six villages. He laid down as one of the conditions for the villagers that they should provide the teachers free board and lodging while he and others would see to the other expenses. Since the villagers could afford to provide foodstuff though not money, they expressed their readiness to contribute their mite.

It became a great problem for him to get the teachers. His idea was never to entrust children to commonplace teachers. Their literary qualification was not so much essential as their moral fibre. So he issued a public appeal for voluntary teachers. There was a ready response and the contingent of teachers who volunteered were fairly strong. Some of them were ladies.

What was actually taught by the teacher-volunteers is really interesting. Gandhi did not expect them to teach the rudiments of alphabets and numerals. He explained to them that they were expected to teach the children not formal grammar and 3 R's so much as cleanliness and good manners. This is a clear indication of the very high regard that Gandhi always had for character and value of personal and social cleanliness. The result was that the classes taken by the ladies were found to be most successful. This experience inspired them with confidence and interest in their work. Their enthusiasm, like a contagion, reached the other village women. Gandhi did not stop with providing them primary education. Since he had first-hand knowledge of the economic conditions of the villages—insanitary surroundings, filthy lanes surrounded by mud and stink and untidy courtyards—he decided to do as much sanitary work as possible and to penetrate every department of their lives. Since doctors were needed for this kind of work,

he requested the Servants of India Society to lend them the services of their doctors. The teacher-volunteers, men and women, had all to work under the doctor, late Dr. Dey who readily offered his services. Gandhi specifically instructed the teachers not to involve themselves in politics or to concern themselves with grievances against planters. People who had any complaints to make were to be referred to him. Every one of the teachers stuck to his guns and carried out his instructions with remarkable fidelity. There was not a single instance of indiscipline.

With his enthusiastic band of teacher-volunteers and the services of an expert doctor at his disposal, Gandhi was in a position to launch a programme of civic education. The volunteers looked after medical relief and sanitation. The womenfolk had of necessity to be approached by women. As far as possible Gandhi entrusted each school with one man and one woman. The doctor used to visit each health centre on certain fixed days in the week. Complicated cases were referred to the doctor and in other ordinary cases the volunteers themselves administered medical relief with the medical kits they were provided. No patient was permitted to take home any medicine. Quite a number of people availed themselves of this simple relief. Only in regard to sanitation the people were not prepared to do anything themselves. Dr. Dey and the volunteers put themselves heart and soul into the matter and they concentrated their energies on making a village ideally clean. Their intensive efforts in community development set a good example to the villagers and lovingly persuaded the villagers to raise volunteers from amongst themselves.

Gandhi's hope of putting this constructive work on a permanent footing was not fulfilled. Since many of the volunteers were only honorary workers, they could not be obtained on a permanent basis.

Third Stage

The third stage is the eight years' programme of basic education for boys and girls between the seventh and the fifteenth year.

Fourth Stage

The fourth stage is that of post-basic education or the education of adolescents who have completed Basic Education. "This is to be conceived as the educational nurture of adolescent youth from the fifteenth to the eighteenth year of life. While basic education may be described as 'education for self-sufficiency,' post-basic education should be planned as 'education through self-sufficiency'. The educational community which at this stage should be residential, possibly taking the form of a 'school village,' should provide opportunity for a great range of productive activities which will both support the community and afford the basis of sound and well-organised knowledge. The post-basic school should lead on naturally either to the responsibilities of adult family life in one or the other of normal productive occupations of humanity, or (in the case of those with strong natural bent and aptitude) to some forms of professional training in a University."¹³

As a result of the above conference, four committees were appointed to prepare and revise schemes of education suiting the four stages of life. Sewagram was accordingly chosen as the first field for work on a complete programme of Nai Talim. A pre-basic school was opened and steps were taken to work out a programme of adult education which would aim at educating the village adults to lead a

13. Page x, *Basic National Education*—M.K. Gandhi Hindustani Talimi Sangh, Sewagram, Wardhla, M.P.

better, fuller and richer life both as individuals and as social units. Such an education was to be imparted through some suitable rural handicraft and other creative and recreative activities. It would touch the life of the villager at all points and would utilize all life situations for the above purpose.

The first syllabus of Basic Education prepared by the Zakir Hussain Committee in March, 1938, was revised by a special committee and it planned a complete educational programme of eight years' duration on the basis of the experience gained since the beginning of the scheme. The main features of the programme of a complete eight years' Basic Education that was placed before the conference were as follows :

"The objectives of Basic Education can be summarised as a two-fold aim, each part of which is integrally bound up with the other.

1. All boys and girls in India should grow up as citizens of a new social order, based on co-operative work as envisaged by Nai Talim and with an understanding of their rights, responsibilities and obligations in such a society.

2. Every individual child should have full opportunity for the balanced and harmonious development of all his faculties and should acquire the capacity for self-reliance in every aspect of a clean, healthy and cultured life, together with an understanding of the social and moral implication of such a life."¹⁴

When the first batch of pupils trained in the basic schools completed their course of seven years

14. Page 3, *Basic National Education*, Hindustani Talimi Sangh, Sewagram, Wardha, M.P.

in Sewagram and other places, it became necessary to define the objectives and the programme of the next stage—post—Basic. Therefore a committee was appointed to go into the whole question and the objectives of post-Basic Education were defined. It was also decided that the course of post-Basic Education must not only give the students a vocation or train them for all-round individual life but must also prepare them for wise parenthood and creative citizenship for the new social order. According to Gandhi, post—Basic Education must be self-supporting as Basic Education. At the instance of Gandhi, two experiments in post—Basic Education were conducted, one at Kumarabagh, Champaran, Bihar and another at Sewagram. The results fully justified Gandhi's expectation regarding the self-sufficiency aspect of post-Basic Education.

The fourth All-India Basic Education Conference which was held in April 1948 at Bikram in Bihar reiterated its faith in the efficiency of Nai Talim as an instrument for evolving a new social order as contemplated by Gandhi. It also renewed its pledge to work strenuously for the realization of this ideal.

Value and Limitations of the Basic Scheme

Since 1948 a number of Basic Education conferences have been held to review the progress of Basic Education and to adopt practicable measures to make Basic Education a success. Whether Basic Education has taken firm root in the country may be a debatable issue. (The value of the basic system becomes important in a decentralised method of production, through small-scale industries, which has now been accepted as an essential part of socialist economics. The country-wide network of small and medium industries is

likely to provide ample scope for employment to students who have learnt some craft in basic schools. Therefore, if the basic method, which takes into account the practical utility of education is implemented with sincerity, the schools and colleges of India, can become real bee-hives of productive activity instead of remaining the centres of mere bookish learning as they are today, as Gandhiji envisaged.

The Government of India and Planning Commission, have accepted the Wardha Scheme as the future pattern of education. If Basic Education has not made appreciable progress, it must be attributed to the attitude of a few educationists in the country who consider the scheme as a fad. Of course, they may not reject it in an outright manner, but at the same time they do not accept it. They seem to feel that the old system was good, because it produced great persons. But that should not by any means be an argument against the new system. The vacillating attitude on the part of those in charge of education in the country has done not a little harm to the cause of Basic Education, which instead of taking any definite shape, the system has been just drifting along. Realising this sad state of confusion—bordering on educational anarchy—the Congress at its Avadi session, has rightly called upon the State Government to introduce Basic Education within a period of ten years.

There are still some who feel that the aim of Basic Education is merely to produce skilled craftsmen. Those who entertain such a feeling are only doing gross injustice to this revolutionary plan. In the Basic Scheme, crafts are not taught in a mechanical manner as in ordinary workshops. Academic subjects are also taught through the medium of craft and this process not only makes the learning of these subjects easier and more

interesting but also enables the pupils to learn some socially useful work as well. The Standing Committee on Basic Education has rightly pointed out that the emphasis laid on productive work and crafts in basic schools does not ignore the study of books. The value of the book, both as a source of systematised knowledge and of pleasure cannot be denied by anybody and a good library is always as essential as it is in any other type of good schools. As the teaching of traditional subjects and a good number of others, through productive activities, helps in the development of every aspect of human personality, the social purpose of education is also amply realised. (Rightly has it been said that basic education is essentially an education for life, and what is more, an education through life.

Su g e s t i o n s f o r I m p r o v e m e n t

If basic education is to play an effective role in building anew the old and static Indian economy, great care must be exercised in the matter of selection of crafts, quite in accordance with the needs and requirements of a particular locality. Such a wise policy will greatly help in raising the economic standards of that area. If Basic Education is to make rapid progress in urban areas, there should not be too much emphasis on spinning and weaving. The people living in urban areas will accept it readily if only crafts involving technical skills are employed to impart education. Similarly, in the rural areas also, the scope in the choice of crafts may be somewhat widened, so as to enable young persons to acquire some technological knowledge for improving the efficiency and productivity of village industries. Further, at present, the pattern of education in the rural and urban sectors is vastly different. The rural people harbour a certain amount of grievance due to this divergence—lack of uniformity in the system of

education. They feel that they are condemned to an inferior type of education. A feeling of such a kind does stand in the way of creating a common social purpose.

Another vital question connected with Basic Education is whether all the existing traditional schools (non-basic) can be converted into basic schools. One of the main reasons for not doing so is the plausible argument that the cost of education in basic schools is more than in ordinary schools, since the erection of workshops involves heavy expenditure. By way of suggestion, it may be pointed out that one way out is to make full use of the existing crafts in villages and towns. A considerable saving in the primary expense on equipment and workshops could be effected if only the decision taken by the Government of India some time ago to utilise fully the schemes of the Community Projects, the National Extension Services, the All-India Khadi and Village Industries Board and the Small-Scale Industries, for imparting education to the children studying in basic schools through productive activities is fully implemented.

If Basic Education is to make further progress in the country, it should be borne in mind, however, that merely turning existing primary schools into basic ones, will not be enough, unless secondary schools are also run on a similar pattern—the basic pattern.

The basic system of education does possess certain merits, intrinsic in its worth. It possesses dynamism which is sadly lacking in the traditional system and is also best suited for a socialist economy. Under such a system, the child learns everything by doing and as a result of that the systematic and harmonious development of the head, heart and

hand is made possible. He is able to earn a little while he learns and this in turn arouses a spirit of self-reliance. The child has an advantage in being made to feel that he is becoming socially useful. In the Basic system, experience takes the place of theoretical instruction, dignity of labour which is sadly lacking is instilled in the minds of the young ones, replacing to a large extent the age-old artificial distinction between intellectual and manual work. The basic system affords opportunities for all the pupils to work together on terms of equality and the prejudices of social distinctions easily disappear.

SECTION VII

The Educational Ideas of Mahamta Gandhi

Gandhi loved his mother-tongue so much that he would cling to it as to his mother's breast. He averred that no one who was indifferent to his mother-tongue could claim to be a lover of his country. He knew the evils of the foreign medium and therefore felt certain that the children of the nation that received instruction in a tongue other than their own committed suicide. It was his belief that it deprived them of their birth-right and a foreign medium meant an undue strain upon the youngsters ; since it robbed them of all originality. It stunted their growth and isolated them from their home. Therefore, Gandhi went to the extent of considering instruction through a foreign medium as a national tragedy of first importance. That was why he always encouraged education only through the vernaculars. He rightly observes, "We never master the English language : With some exceptions it has not been possible for us to do so, we can never express ourselves so clearly as we can in our own mother-tongue. How dare we rub out of our memory all the years of our infancy ? But that is precisely what we do when we commence our higher life, as we call it, through the medium of a foreign tongue. This creates a breach in our life, for bringing which we shall have to pay dearly and heavily."¹

Gandhi was aware of the tremendous wastage

1. Page 43, *To The Students*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

of time and labour involved in learning a foreign language. Speaking about the wastage he pointed out: "Just consider for one moment what an unequal race our lads have to run with every English lad. I had the privilege of a close conversation with some Poona professors. They assured me that every Indian youth, because he reached his knowledge through the English language, lost at least six precious years of life. Multiply that by the number of students turned out by our schools and colleges and find out for yourselves how many thousand years have been lost to the nation."² The above is indeed a very good remark worth pondering over. Gandhi was of opinion that the saving in time and labour by learning through the mother-tongue would be even greater. Moreover he thought that learning through the mother-tongue would bridge the gap between the thought-world of men and women in India. He considered that what they learnt through the mother-tongue they would easily be able to communicate to their mothers and sisters at home and thereby bring the latter into line with themselves. Gandhi did not want knowledge to be the monopoly of a few English educated men, but to have it extended to all womenfolk who were backward and ignorant. Such was his great regard for the women of India that he felt that India could not realise her full stature unless the great and special handicap from which women were suffering was removed—ignorance.

Therefore, he accorded the rightful place to the vernacular in education. He emphasised the vernacular to the exclusion of English as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. He rightly maintains: "India has to flourish in her own climate and scenery, and her own literature, even

2. Page 47, *Towards New Education*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan 1953.

though all the three may be inferior to the English climate, scenery and literature. We and our children must build on our own heritage. If we borrow another, we impoverish our own. We can never grow on foreign victuals. I want the nation to have the treasures contained in that language, and for that matter the other languages of the world, through its own vernaculars."³ Thus Gandhi claims a rightful place for the vernaculars.

Since Gandhi always stood for reducing the strain of learning a foreign language, he would suggest by way of economy to set apart a class of students whose business would be to learn the best of what was to be learnt in the different languages of the world and give the translation in the vernaculars. He regretted very much for the then existing wrong practice set by the masters which habit has made the wrong appear as right.

He was keenly alive to the limitations under which the English-educated Indians were suffering, especially the innumerable graduates who flounder when they have to give expression to their innermost thoughts. The pity of it being that vocabulary in the mother-tongue is so limited that they cannot always finish their speech without having recourse to English words and even sentences. Daily proof of the increasing and continuing wrong that was being done to the millions by the false de-Indianising education was not wanting for him.

What is the remedy? Gandhi would suggest that the medium of instruction be immediately altered at any cost, the provincial languages being given their rightful place. He would prefer temporary chaos in higher education to the criminal waste that is daily accumulating.

3. Page 51, *Ibid.*

It was his opinion that by making the language of the court, the language of the province where the court was situated, the status and market value of the provincial languages could be enhanced. He wanted the proceedings of the provincial legislatures to be in the language or even the languages of the province where it had more than one language. He felt that the legislators could, by enough application inside of a month, easily understand the languages of their own provinces. Therefore, he thought that there was nothing which could prevent a Tamilian, for instance, from easily learning the simple grammar and a few hundred words of Telugu, Malayalam and Kanarese, all allied to Tamil.

While making a strong plea for the vernacular as the medium of instruction, he also accords it a rightful place. While doing so, he does not altogether ignore the place of English in the curriculum. There were many who thought that he was uncompromising in his opposition to the foreign medium and that his attitude to foreign culture or to the learning of the English language was one of hostility. The very columns of the *Harijan* in which he expressed his wonderful ideas in beautiful English are sufficient evidence his love of English. Replying to an unwarranted charge levelled against him, he observes: "English is a language of international commerce, it is the language of diplomacy and it contains many a rich literary treasure, it gives us an introduction to Western thought and culture. For a few of us, therefore, a knowledge of English is necessary. They can carry on the departments of national commerce and international diplomacy and for giving the nation the best of Western literature, thought and science. That would be the legitimate use of English."⁴

4. Page 53, *To The Students*—M.K. Gandhi, *Navajivan*, 1949.

Pointing out the evils of learning through a foreign medium, he remarks :

“Whereas today, English has usurped the dearest place in our hearts and dethroned our mother-tongues. It is an unnatural place due to our unequal relations with Englishmen. The highest development of the Indian mind must be possible without a knowledge of English. It is doing violence to the manhood and specially the womanhood of India to encourage our boys and girls to think that an early entry into the best society is impossible without knowledge of English. It is too humiliating a thought to be bearable.”⁵

Gandhi openly declared in the columns of the *Harijan* that he was a lover of the English language. He never said that one should not learn English. He would advise that others should learn it by all means. But so far as he could see, it could not be the language of the millions of Indian homes. It would be confined to thousands or tens of thousands, but it would not reach the millions.

What then was the place of English in his scheme of education ? In regard to that he maintained :

“I love the English tongue in its own place but I am its inveterate opponent, if it usurp a place which does not belong to it. English today is admittedly the world language. I would therefore accord it a place as a second, optional language, not in the school, but in the University course. That can only be for a select few—not for the millions. Today when we have not the means to introduce even free compulsory primary education, how can we make provision for teaching English ?

Russia has achieved all her scientific progress without English. It is our mental slavery that makes us feel that we cannot do without English. I can never subscribe to that defeatist creed.”⁶

Whether or not it is possible to impart technical education through the mother-tongue is a question on which opinions differ among educationists in India. There are some who argue that technical education is one of the difficult tasks to be undertaken in the mother-tongue when compared with that of teaching humanities through the same medium. Often, one of the reasons that is attributed to it is the lack of suitable text-books in the vernaculars. Another reason is that the vernaculars do not contain enough vocabulary through which technical terms could be well experienced. Gandhi always deprecated the suggestion that it would need a lot of research and preparation to enable the teachers to impart technical education through the medium of the mother-tongue. According to Gandhi those who argued like that were not aware of the rich treasure of expression and idioms that were buried in the native dialects of Indian villages. Gandhi was quite convinced from his practical experience that there was no need to go to any language other than one's own in search for many expressions. While he was in Champaran, he had found that the village folk there could fully express themselves with ease and without the help of a single foreign expression or idiom.

By way of suggestion, Gandhi would point out that the want, lack of text-books, could be supplied if only the medium of instruction would be changed at once and not gradually. If that were done, in an incredibly short time, suitable textbooks could

6. Pages 65-66, *Towards New Education*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1953.

be found and enough teachers would come into being. Therefore, Gandhi emphasised the need for quick action in order to prevent the tragic waste of the nation's time and energy in trying to learn the essentials of culture through a foreign medium. He pleaded for the immediate adoption of the provincial languages in all Government offices and courts to set an example to educational institutions to follow suit. According to Gandhi, the difficulties, whether imaginary or real, of imparting technical education through the vernaculars would pale into insignificance, if only one believed in the necessity of reform.

Gandhi had decided opinions on what should be the national language of India. According to him English could not become a national language since it did not satisfy the conditions which he laid down as the test. What is the test of national language? Gandhi laid down the following conditions :

“(1) For the official class it should be easy to learn.

(2) The religious, commercial and political activity throughout India should be possible in that language.

(3) It should be the speech of the majority of the inhabitants of India.

(4) For the whole country it should be easy to learn.

(5) In considering the question, weight ought not to be put upon momentary or short-lived conditions.”⁷

In the opinion of Gandhi, Hindi satisfied all the necessary conditions and therefore, it alone could become a national language. He held the view that a knowledge of English could open up intercourse only with the comparatively few English-knowing Indians, whereas, a possible knowledge of Hindustani would enable every one to hold intercourse with the largest number of India's countrymen. Without a knowledge of Hindustani it would be impossible for the people to go to the other States of India which speak nothing but Hindustani. Therefore, Gandhi advised everyone to learn Hindustani in his leisure hours. He agreed to differ with others when they talked of the poverty of Hindi. The pages of Tulsidas, in his opinion, could stand any criticism and scrutiny alike in literary grace, in metaphor and in religious fervour. He hoped that others also would share his opinion that there was no other book that stood equal to it in the literature of the world in modern languages.

There were some who expressed the fear that the propagation of Rashtrabhasha or the national language would prove inimical to the provincial languages. He declared that such a fear is rooted only in ignorance. He did not wish that the national language should replace all the regional languages of India. He rather held the view that provincial languages provided the sure foundation on which the edifice of the national language should rest. According to Gandhi both the national and provincial languages are intended to complement and not completely supplant each other. He emphasised the need for a common language, not in supercession of the vernaculars but in addition to them.

The question of the script has also been for a long time a heated and controversial issue

in this country, the greatest obstacle in the way being the numerous scripts for the vernaculars. In his opinion, only by adopting a common script could the great hindrance in the way of realising the dream of having a common language be removed. Of course, he knew that a common script for all India was a distant ideal. It could become a practical ideal if only all those who speak the Indo-Sanskrit languages, including the Southern stock would but shed their provincialism. In this connection Gandhi aptly remarks: "A provincial patriotism is good where it feeds the larger stream of all-India patriotism, as the latter is good to the extent that it serves the still larger end of the universe. But a provincial patriotism that says, 'India is nothing, Gujarat is all', is wickedness."⁸

When called upon to solve the knotty problem, Gandhi declared that Devanagari should be the common script, the deciding factor being that it was the script known to the largest part of India.

While advocating such a measure, Gandhi was actuated by ideas of bringing in peace and order in a united India. Therefore, in his humble opinion all undeveloped and unwritten dialects of India should be sacrificed and merged in the great Hindustani stream. Such a sacrifice would be noble and not a suicide. He held strongly in order to have a common language for cultured India, the unwanted growth of any process of disintegration or multiplication of languages and scripts should be arrested. He believed that there should be only one script for all Indian languages and that script should be Devanagari. Gandhi declared :

"If I could have my view, I would make the learning of Devanagri script and Urdu script, in addition to the established provincial script, compulsory in all Indian provinces and I would print in Devanagri chief books in the different vernaculars with a literal translation in Hindustani."⁹ Whenever he insisted that the Arabic script should also be learnt by each and every Indian, it was out of his desire to unite the two styles, *viz.*, Hindi and Urdu, by promoting the knowledge of both and also at the same time promote Hindu-Muslim unity.

Even now there are many who maintain or claim certain greater merits and advantages for the Roman script than for the Devanagri script and therefore such people would like to replace the latter by the former. In the opinion of Gandhi, such a replacing would be nothing short of a fatal blunder—finding oneself in the fire out of the frying pan. To those who would suggest the adoption of the Roman script as the most satisfactory solution, he would point out that its sole merit lay only in its convenience for just printing and typing purposes and it would be nothing when compared to the strain its learning would put upon millions. He held that the Roman script could be of no help to the millions who had to read their own literature either in their own provincial script or in Devanagri script. It may also be noted here in passing that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru also subscribes to the view of Gandhi that Hindustani written in both the scripts should be the national language of India. Even the Radhakrishnan Commission has been of the opinion that the official language of India should be written in the Devanagri script and that it would be advantageous to use the Urdu script as a second

script as it has been widely used. In the Constitution of India only the Devanagri script has been given prominence and next to it is the Urdu script. It will be thus seen that the fundamental views of Gandhi are acceptable to both the Constituent Assembly and the Radhakrishnan Commission.

Gandhi had a nodding acquaintance with many languages. In fact he was a lover of them all. He could speak and read some of those languages. While he was in South Africa he took upon himself the responsibility of teaching several Indian languages to the Indian settlers who came from different parts of India. Therefore, he has keenly felt the necessity and advantages of learning (as many as) several of the Indian languages by an Indian. It was his view that "every cultured Indian should know in addition to his own provincial language, if a Hindu, Sanskrit; if a Mohammedan, Arabic, if a Parsee, Persian; and all, Hindi. Some Hindus should know Arabic and Persian; some Mohammedans and Parsees, Sanskrit. Several Northerners and Westerners learn Tamil. A universal language should be Hindi, with the option of writing it in Persian or Nagari character."¹⁰ His love of Sanskrit was very great.

He took keen interest in the sacred books written in that language. He even used to regret that his knowledge of it was not thorough. It was his conviction and strong desire that every Hindu boy and girl should possess sound Sanskrit learning. He accorded a rightful place for several Indian languages in the educational scheme. His breadth of outlook becomes evident when he says, "It is now my opinion that in all Indian curricula of higher education, there should be a place for Hindi,

Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and English, besides of course the vernacular."¹¹ He held the view that the learning of several languages could be made a pleasure, instead of being an irksome task, provided education was made more systematic and the boys were free from the burden of having to learn their subjects through a foreign medium.

Gandhi has given great thinking to the problem of sex education in Indian curricula. Whether or not instruction in sexual science should form a part of the educational system in India has been engaging the attention of great educationists in the country. In some Western countries instruction in sexual science forms an integral part of the curriculum and there it has been considered necessary also for each and every individual to know something about the functions of sex. In India no decision has so far been taken regarding whether or not it should find a place in a curriculum. The intellectual climate in India has not been so far favouring the adoption of a proposal of imparting instruction in sexual science. Therefore, no importance or serious thinking has been so far given to it, with the result that instruction in sexual science has been completely neglected. On the other hand, educational psychologists in Western countries have been found to be emphasising the need for such instructions with a view to prevent abnormalities in behaviour of the students in the adolescent and post-adolescent periods.

What has Gandhi to contribute in this regard ?

He has gone ahead of the times in having given mature thinking and deliberation to this important aspect in education and its place in the educational system. He would divide sexual science into two

kinds, that which is used for controlling or overcoming the sexual passion and that which is used to stimulate and feed it. According to Gandhi, instruction in controlling or overcoming the sexual passion is a very essential part of a child's education and that which stimulates and feeds the sexual passion is not only harmful and dangerous but it is to be thoroughly shunned.

His reply to the question whether it is desirable to impart to young pupils a knowledge about the use and the function of generative organs is in the affirmative. To him it seems that it is necessary to impart such instruction to a certain extent. The little knowledge that the youngsters possess about sex is gathered just casually in a scrappy manner and more often than not they are misled into all kinds of abusive practices. Therefore Gandhi has rightly thought that the proper control or conquest of sexual passion would not be possible by simply turning a blind eye to it. He was strongly in favour of teaching young boys and girls the significance and right use of their generative organs. In his own way also, he had tried to impart such knowledge to young children belonging to the two sexes for whose training he was responsible.

What should be the object of sex education? According to Gandhi, sex education must have for its object the conquest and sublimation of the sex passion. "Such education should automatically serve to bring home to children the essential distinction between man and brute, to make them realize that it is man's special privilege and pride to be gifted with the faculties of head and heart both; that he is a thinking man no less than a feeling animal, as the derivation of the word '*Manushya*' shows and to renounce the sovereignty of reason over the blind instincts is to renounce a man's estate. In man reason quickens and guides the feeling, in brute

the soul lies ever dormant. To awaken heart is to awaken the dormant soul, to awaken reason, and to inculcate the distinction between good and evil ”¹² From the above analysis it becomes evident that Gandhi has been animated by a desire for the conquest of lust as the highest endeavour of a man's or woman's existence. In his opinion, man cannot hope to rule over his self without overcoming lust.

Gandhi's ideal behind sex education is no doubt a very laudable one. If the ideal is to be achieved who should teach this true science of sex ? “Clearly, he who has attained mastery over his passions. To teach astronomy and kindred sciences we have teachers who have gone through a course of training in them and are masters of their art. Even so must we have as teachers of sexual science, i.e., the science of sex control, those who have studied it and have acquired mastery over self. Even a lofty utterance that has not the backing of sincerity and experience, will be inert and lifeless and will utterly fail to penetrate and quicken the hearts of men, while the speech that springs from self-realization and genuine experience is always fruitful.”¹³ Thus Gandhi wants the teacher of the science of sex to be one who has attained mastery over his passions and practised self-control or self-restraint. According to him amateurs are not qualified to teach it.

He deprecated very much that the entire environment of the day which is not far different today was generally calculated to purely subserve and cater for the sex-urge. Of course he was not unaware of the huge task of breaking through its evils. But yet he considered the task worthy of experiment even if there were a handful of qualified

12. Pages 252-253, *To The Students*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

13. Page 253, *Ibid*,

teachers—endowed with practical experience, who would accept the ideal of attaining self-control as the highest duty of man, who would have a true faith in their mission and would be sleeplessly vigilant and ceaselessly active. Only such teachers, he hoped, would be qualified to save the unwary youngsters from inadvertently falling into the mire of sexuality and rescue those who might be already engulfed in it. Instances of juvenile sexual irregularities and promiscuity are not wanting even nowadays in some Indian educational institutions. They are rather continuously increasing and statistical proof is also astounding. Such irregularities in the youngsters are attributed by the educationists to morbidity and lack of proper knowledge and understanding about the right use and function of generative organs. When they become well-equipped with such knowledge, the sex complex may not be steadily gaining ground as it is today. The suggestions of Mahatma Gandhi, in this connection are really worthy of consideration by the educationists.

From the above analysis, it is quite obvious that Gandhi is a favourite of sex education and this also shows the modern trend in his educational ideas.

Quite unlike the traditional educationists he accords sex education a rightful place in the curriculum. His object of sex education is the nobler ideal of conquest and sublimation of the sex passion. He considers a knowledge of the use and function of generative organs as essential and therefore desires to impart such knowledge to young pupils. He would recommend only qualified teachers—those possessing self-control and mastery over self to undertake the responsibility of teaching sexual science. Thus Gandhi's views on sex and its place in education are in line with the modern trend in educational thought.

India is a secular State. It does not mean a State of irreligion. But whether religious instructions should form a part of the curriculum in a secular state is a controversial issue. The question of religious education was of course difficult even for Gandhi. Being an idealist in his educational philosophy he could not do without religion—since his chief aim of life was self-realization. He was quite convinced that India would never be godless. He declared that rank atheism could not flourish in India. Yet he recognised that the task of religious education was really stupendous.

Before going into the details of the question of religious education it will be better to know what Gandhi actually meant by religion. To him, religion, Truth and *Ahimsa* were interchangeable terms. In this connection he observes :

“To me religion means Truth and *Ahimsa* or Truth alone, because Truth includes *Ahimsa*, *Ahimsa* being the necessary and indispensable means for its discovery. Therefore, anything that promotes the practice of these virtues is a means for imparting religious education, and the best way to do this, in my opinion, is for the teachers rigorously to practise these virtues in their own person. Their very association with the boys whether on the playground or in the class-room will then give the pupils a fine training in these fundamental virtues.”¹⁴

Religion was a way of life for Gandhi and hence it meant Truth or *Ahimsa*. Only a life of truth and non-violence alone could constitute a truly religious life and therefore anything that promoted the practice of those virtues would be a means for imparting religious education. Religion was not a

14. Page 45, *Towards New Education*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1953.

matter of mere preaching, but practice of the virtues of Truth and *Ahimsa*. Therefore, he considered it essential for teachers first of all to lead a pure and religious life so that by their very association they could affect the religious sphere or aspect of their life—it would give the pupils a very fine training in the fundamental virtues. So much for instruction in the universal essentials of religion.

What about the regular curriculum of religious instruction? Being a great liberal in his religious outlook, his views on matters religious are characterised by catholicity and broad-mindedness and not narrowness or fanaticism. In his opinion, a curriculum of religious instruction should include a study of the tenets of faiths other than one's own. For that purpose, the students, he considered, should be trained to cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrines of various great religions of the world in a spirit of reverence and broad-minded tolerance. If that would be properly done, he hoped, it would help them greatly in giving them not only a spiritual assurance but also a better appreciation of their own religion. While studying all great religions, according to Gandhi, one rule should always be kept in mind, that is, that one should study them only through the writings of known votaries of the respective religions and not through a translation of it made by hostile critics. While emphasising a need for a study of other religions besides one's own, he points out that such a study will give not only a firm grasp of the rock-bottom unity of all religions but also a glimpse of that universal and absolute truth which lies beyond the dust of creeds and faiths. He dispelled the fear that a reverent study of other religions would weaken or shake one's faith in one's own religion. On the other hand, he held the view, that study and appreciation of other religions should

mean extension of the regard that one has for one's own religion to other religions.

How to impart religious instruction ? He has himself experimented with quite a number of boys and girls in his charge in order to understand how best to impart religious instruction. From his experiments he has found that while book instruction was somewhat of an aid, it was useless by itself. He discovered that religious instruction to be effective must be imparted by teachers living the religion themselves. He also found that boys imbibed more from the teachers' own lives than they did from the books that they read to them or the lectures delivered to them. It is his observation that boys and girls have unconsciously a faculty of penetration whereby they read the thought of their teachers. Therefore, according to Gandhi the personal character of the teacher is far more influential in the matter of religious instruction than that of mere book-instruction or preaching.

Regarding provision of religious instruction in the curriculum, Gandhi felt that if India was not to declare spiritual bankruptcy, religious instruction of its youth must be held as necessary as secular instruction. Of course, he is aware of the fact that in a country like India where there are most religions of the world represented and where there are so many denominations in the same religion, there must be difficulty about making provision for religious instruction. He realized fully well that mere knowledge of religions was not enough and that it would be no equivalent of that of religion. So long as religion is not to be had, he contended, one must be satisfied with the next best. He advocated self-help in the matter of religion also as about other things, whether or not such instruction were given in the schools.

In case religious instructions are given with sectarian motives certain evils are likely to creep in. In Gandhi's view the evils of such religious instruction would vanish with the evolution of the true religious spirit. There are some educationists who do not believe in any religion and therefore they are not for religious instructions. Gandhi felt that to give up religious instruction was like letting the field lie fallow and grow weeds for want of the tiller's knowledge of the proper use of the field. Faith was the greatest living force with him and therefore works without faith and prayer were meaningless to him and they were like an artificial flower that had no fragrance. While he believes that a purely secular education is also an attempt to mould the young mind after a fashion, it does not take much care of the soul.

Gandhi could not conceive of anything that did not have a religious backing and therefore the maxim of his life was that no work done by any man, no matter how great he was, would really prosper, unless he had a religious backing. His concept of religion is such that it is not to be got after reading all the Scriptures of the world; religion is not merely a grasp of the brain, but it is a heart grasp. It is not a thing which is foreign to one but it is a thing that has to be evolved out of oneself. As Gandhi himself observes: "It is always within us, with some consciously so, with the others quite unconsciously. But it is there; and whether we wake up this religious instinct in us through outside assistance or by inward growth, no matter how it is done, it has got to be done if we want to do anything in the right manner and anything that is going to persist."¹⁵

While making a strong plea for religious educa-

¹⁵ Page 34, *To the Students*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

tion, he deliberately omitted it from the Wardha Scheme. In the Basic Scheme, there is no room for giving sectional religious training. Fundamental universal ethics finds full scope in it. He did not lay stress in his Basic Scheme on mere religious instruction because he wanted to teach the pupils practical religion, the religion of self-help. What he deliberately omitted in the Basic Scheme was religious instruction in the sense of denominational religion. In this connection Gandhi rightly observes :

“Unless there is a State religion, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to provide religious instruction as it would mean providing for every denomination. Such instruction is best given at home. The State should allow enough time for every child to receive such instruction at home or otherwise. It is also conceivable, that the State should provide facilities for private tuition by those denominations which may wish to instruct their children at school provided that such instruction is paid for by such denominations.”¹⁶

From the above it is clear, that Gandhi does not want religion to be imposed upon the subjects. He recognizes the difficulties involved in teaching religion in India where there are people belonging to different religious sects and various denominations in the same religion.

He held strong views as to the necessity of teaching equal regard for all religions. He regarded it as fatal to the growth of a friendly spirit among the children belonging to the different faiths, if they were taught that their religion was superior to every other or that it was the only true religion. Once that complex is developed, the spirit of

16. Page 69, *Basic Education*—M.K.Gandhi, Navajivan, 1956.

exclusiveness will pervade the nation. That being the case, the necessary corollary would be that there should be separate schools for every denomination, with freedom to teach to decry every other or that the mention of religion must be entirely prohibited. Such a state of affairs, if allowed to continue, would have, according to Gandhi, dreadful consequences. Therefore, in his opinion, fundamental principles are common to all religions and these should certainly be taught to the children and that should be regarded as adequate religious instructions so far as the schools under the Wardha Scheme are concerned.

Regarding the question whether religious instructions should be made compulsory, he did not approve of it since he did not believe in State religion. He aimed at freedom in religion also as in politics and therefore State interference in matters religious would be always unwelcome. He would not also encourage State aid to religious bodies. That did not mean he was opposed to ethical teaching ; but he only considered the teaching of fundamental ethics as essential.

Gandhi's services to the womanhood of India are great. He began to be of service to India's women even while he was in South Africa. His regard for the fair sex was so great that he could not even think ill of them. To him, she was, as described in English, the better-half of man. Being a great lover of mankind, he could not tolerate injustice in any form. In his address to the students of Karachi, he expressed his deep regret thus :

“Instead of making their wives queens of their homes and their hearts, they had converted them into chattels to be bought and sold. Was this the lesson that they had imbibed from the reading of

English literature? Woman had been described as the *ardhangna* or the better-half of man. But they had reduced her to the position of a slave and the result was the state of paralysis in which they found their country.”¹⁷ The above address testifies to his high regard for women.

Instances of molestation of girls by young boys in schools and colleges are not uncommon nowadays. Gandhi has himself been an eye-witness of the above. Therefore, he has given deep thinking to the problem and has tried to solve it in his original manner. Whenever a girl becomes a victim of molestation by young boys, he would ask them to develop courage enough to die rather than yield to the brute in man. He would venture to suggest that a girl who has the will to resist can burst all the bonds that may have been used to render her helpless. In his opinion, the resolute will would give her the strength to die. In order to meet such situations, Gandhi wanted that women should receive proper training without which the heroism could not be developed. He wished that women should at least learn the ordinary art of self-defence and protect themselves from indecent behaviour of unchivalrous youth.

What pained him much was the lack of civility among boys in schools and colleges. The great question to him was, why should young men be devoid of elementary good manners so as to make decent girls be in perpetual fear of molestation from them. He was grieved to discover that the majority of young men have lost their sense of chivalry. They should, according to him, as a class, be jealous of their reputation and deal with every case of impropriety occurring among their mates. It was his desire that they should learn to hold the honour

17. Pages 171-172, *To the Students*—M.K Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

of every woman as dear as that of their own sisters and mothers. He considered that education of boys to be useless and vain, which did not teach them good manners or gentlemanliness.

In his enthusiasm for emancipating women from the various kinds of bondages in which they have been kept and the injustices from which they were suffering, he was not blind to their many defects. He is quite aware that the modern girl loves to be Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. The modern girl, he knows, dresses not to protect herself from wind, rain and sun but to attract attention, trying to improve upon nature by painting herself and looking extraordinary. He openly criticized those defects in modern girls. He knew that they were all the result of an artificial English collegiate education—an education that sets great store by artificial values.

Being a great reformer, he gave great thinking to the social evils of the day—the dowry system. It pained him very much that educated young men should insist on dowry. The system has to go. All this would mean an education of a character that would revolutionize the mentality of the youth of the nation. He considered that education to be of no value which did not enable them to defy a custom that was wholly indefensible and repugnant to one's moral sense. In his view, something is radically wrong in the system of education that fails to arm girls to fight against social or other evils. He would therefore advise educated girls to dare remain spinsters, if need be, *i.e.*, if they did not get a suitable match. It was his considered opinion that no reform could ever be brought about except through intrepid individuals breaking down inhuman customs or usages. Gandhi wants the parents to so educate their daughters that they would refuse to marry a young man who wanted a

price for marrying and would rather remain spinners than be a party to the degrading ones. The only honourable terms in marriage, according to Gandhi, should be mutual love and mutual consent and nothing else. Pointing out the evils of dowry he observes :

“Any young man who makes dowry a condition of marriage discredits his education and his country and dishonours womanhood.”¹⁸

He advises those connected with the youth movement in India to deal with the questions of this character. He is for creating a strong public opinion in condemnation of the degrading practice of dowry. In his view, those young men who soil their fingers with ill-gotten wealth should be excommunicated from society. Will society be prepared for it ? His advice to the parents of girls is that they should cease to be dazzled by English degrees and should not hesitate to travel outside their little castes and provinces to secure true, gallant, young men for their daughters. According to him the parents would be well advised to take the lead in educating their daughters along proper lines—to give them an education which will make them self-reliant and independent.

He had great faith in the potentialities of each and every woman as in the case of each and every man and he knew that women were as capable of rendering public service as men. Hence he did not want the education of women to go to waste. When educated girls disappear from public life as soon as they are discharged from schools and colleges after their getting married, they render a poor return to the country for the great efforts that are being made by educationists and by lavish chari-

ties. He did not like educated women becoming slaves or dolls in the hands of their husbands but wanted them to be of service to the womanhood of India. According to him every Indian girl is not born to marry. At least some of them should dedicate themselves to service instead of serving one man. It was his ambition rather, that Hindu girls should produce or reproduce an edition and if possible a glorified edition, of Parvati and Shiva. His ideal of women's education is that of making them Sisters of Mercy.

There are certain problems in education which are purely related to women such as : "Should women receive the same kind of education as men ?" "Whether co-education is desirable or not"; "If desirable, at what stage ?" Educationists hold different views on such issues. Gandhi has his own distinct contribution to make to education in this particular regard. In his approach to women's education he holds the view that though men and women are of equal rank, they are not identical. That means that the education of man must be distinct from that of woman and therefore the same education will not avail or be of much benefit to both. He keenly realized the truth that man and woman have their distinct contribution to make to humanity and therefore they have their specific capacities and abilities as well as specific spheres in which they can distinguish themselves well. He held the view that man was specifically best fitted for distinguishing himself in the outward activities than woman and therefore, for him, it would be in the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge thereof. On the other hand, home life being entirely the sphere of women, in his view, woman ought to have more knowledge of domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children. His clean insight gave him such a deep understanding of man's nature that it enabled him to think

of the best kind of education that would be imparted to young men and women. It was his conviction, borne out, perhaps by his experience, that unless courses of instruction were based on a discriminating appreciation of the above basic principles, the fullest life of man and woman could not be developed ; not that knowledge should be divided into water-tight compartments or that some branches of knowledge should be completely closed to any one. There may be certain common subjects or knowledge which are to be shared equally by both men and women, but when it comes to a question of specialisation, certain amount of discrimination is essential, according to Gandhi.

Gandhi's views on women's education seem to be very sound in the context of modern India's needs. He thinks that women will profit little by an English education meant purely for men and such an education in Gandhi's opinion will only prolong their helplessness. He does not mind a few women obtaining English education in schools meant for men. What he objected to was women working for a living or undertaking commercial enterprise. According to him, a life of pure materialism and outward activity is meant more for man than for woman. In his opinion, courses of education are to be framed with the needs of an entire society in view and not with a view to supplying the requirements of the few who have cultivated a literary taste.

Gandhi held woman in such high esteem that he rightly considered her as mother of the race. It deeply pained him to find women in an unnatural state of affair, namely, the status of inferiority with which immemorial tradition has unjustly branded her. He sympathised with the sorry state of affairs of women—that man has converted her into a domestic drudge and alas, made her an instru-

ment of his pleasure instead of regarding her as his helpmate. What has been the result? A semi-paralysis of Indian society. Gandhi attributes the cause of illiteracy among women not to mere laziness or inertia as in the case of men but to the terrible and inhuman injustice that man has done to woman. That was the reason why he wanted to emancipate woman from the bondages in which she has been kept by man and restore her to her original status. How was that to be done? By giving woman a proper training so that she could discharge her responsibilities well.

In the Basic Scheme, boys and girls are to be taught together and therefore no differentiation has been made. The Zakir Hussain Committee has not made co-education compulsory. Gandhi was not definite or conclusive whether or not co-education would be successful. He only suggested that whenever there will be a demand for a separate school for girls, the State will have to make provision. Regarding co-education he had an open mind. He thought that there were just as valid reasons for, as against, co-education and therefore, personally he would not oppose the experiment wherever it was made. In his own educational experiments, he has made no distinction between man and woman even though the results were not encouraging. Approaching the problem of co-education with an open mind, he tentatively laid down that there should be co-education up to the age of eight, that as far as possible, boys and girls should be taught together up to the age of sixteen and that after the sixteenth year they should decide for themselves, whether or not they should study together. Even while great experts in education and psychologists are not agreed and have not been able to arrive at definite conclusions on the important issue of co-education, it is no wonder then, that Gandhi has not given his ultimate views

on co-education. Even though his views on co-education were not final yet it was his belief that the education of little boys and girls could be more effectively handled by women than men and by mothers rather than maidens.

Gandhi attached more importance to character-building in education than mere literacy. Literary education is of no value to him if it does not build a sound character. In his opinion, character alone will have effect upon the masses. Therefore he wanted the students to prove their credentials. He held the system of education to be responsible for the lack of character wherever it showed itself. He wanted the teachers to make common cause with the students and guide them properly. In his speech delivered at the Pachaiyappa's College, Madras, to the students, he said, "When your heart is not pure and you cannot master your passions, you cease to be an educated man. You have called your institution a premier institution. I want you to live up to the name of the premier institution which must produce boys who will occupy the front rank in character. And what is education without character and what is character without elementary personal purity."¹⁹ Therefore, education, for Gandhi, is not worth the name without personal purity.

In his speech delivered at the Zahira College, Colombo, he observes : ".....I could not help feeling how nice it would be if we could raise a foundation of good character so that stones on stones might be raised and we might look back with joy and pride upon that edifice. But character cannot be built with mortar and stone. It cannot be built by hands other than your own. The principal and the professors cannot give you character from the pages of books. Character-building

comes from their very lives and really speaking, it must come from within yourselves.”²⁰ It is Gandhi’s belief that character-building comes from within and not from without. According to him, education of the heart cannot be imparted through books but it can only be done through the living touch of the teacher. Therefore the teachers must be themselves men of faith and character who have received the training of the heart.

Further glimpses into the greater values he attached to character-building in education can be obtained from his various speeches delivered to the students on different occasions. In his speech delivered on receiving an address from the students of Vellore he says, “Purity of personal life is the one indispensable condition for building a sound education. And my meetings with thousands of students and the correspondence which I continuously have with the students in which they pour out their innermost feelings and take me into their confidence show me quite clearly that there is much left to be desired.”²¹ He further points out : “All our learning or recitation of the Vedas, correct knowledge of Sanskrit, Latin, Greek and what-not will avail us nothing if they do not enable us to cultivate absolute purity of heart. The end of all knowledge must be building up of character.”²² Gandhi considers character as the most essential thing for the spiritualization of the political life of India. For that he depended on the youth of India who by their sound character could achieve the desired goal. Speaking about the Satyagraha Ashrama in his address delivered at the Y.W.C.A. Auditorium, Madras, he says, “I feel and I have felt during the whole of my public life that what we need, what any nation needs, but we perhaps

20. Pages 124-125, *Ibid.*

21. Pages 106-107, *Ibid.*

22. Page 107, *Ibid.*

of all the nations of the world need just now, is nothing else and nothing less than character-building."²³ Thus it is obvious that the end of all knowledge, according to Gandhi, is building up of character and nothing short of it.

Gandhi has always been thinking of the masses in education than the mere individual. His scheme of Basic National Education aims at universal free and compulsory education. If it is to be free to all it cannot be expensive. If education is, to be brought within reach of all it must naturally be cheap. How can it be made cheap ? By making education self-supporting. It can be made self-supporting if the students are taught round a vocation—based on a suitable craft. Speaking about the existing highly expensive education Gandhi points out : "We have only touched the fringe of an ocean of children. The vast mass of them remain without education not for want of will but of ability and knowledge on the part of parents. There is something radically wrong especially for a nation so far as ours, when parents have to support so many grown-up children and give them a highly expensive education without the children making any immediate return. I can see nothing wrong in the children, from the very threshold of their education, paying for it in work."²⁴ According to Gandhi the children thus equipped will become not only self-reliant and independent but their education will become self-supporting. The cost of education could be minimised and the advantages of education maximised.

It is the considered opinion of Gandhi that the expansion of mind comes from experience and not necessarily from the school or collegiate education. Therefore, he does not set great store by a purely literary education given at great expense. He

23. Page 133, *Ibid.*

24. Page 65-66, *Ibid.*

rightly remarks : "There is too, for us the inordinately expensive education. When it is difficult for millions even to make the two ends meet, when millions are dying of starvation, it is monstrous to think of giving our relatives a costly education. Expansion of the mind will come from hard experience, not necessarily in the college or the school-room. When some of us deny ourselves and ours the so-called higher education, we shall find the true means of giving and receiving a really high education. Is there not, may there not be, a way of each boy paying for his own education ? There may be no such way. Whether there is or there is not, such a way is irrelevant. But there is no doubt that when we deny ourselves the way of expensive education, seeing that aspiration after higher education is a laudable end, we shall find out a way of fulfilling it more in accord with our surroundings. The golden rule to apply in all such cases is relatively to refuse to have what millions cannot."²⁵

Speaking about simplicity in his address to the Adi-karnataka Boys, he pointed out, "I was distressed, my boys, to find that you were forgetting your simple habits and were reluctant to part with your pocket money for the sake of your brethren. I assure you that my father gave me no pocket money and in no other part of India boys of the middle class are treated like you. But the State does not house and feed and educate you in order that you might learn idleness and forget simplicity and self-help. You must learn to wash your own clothes, cook your own food and do all your work yourselves."²⁶ His burden of the song has always been simplicity in education, by training the children in self-help and self-reliance.

25. Page 75, *To The Students*—M.K. Gandhi, *Navajivan*, 1949.

26. Page 99, *Ibid*.

He is deeply distressed to find education being made daily increasingly expensive so as to be beyond the reach of the poorest children. He sounds a note of warning that all should beware of making that serious blunder and incurring the deserved reproach of posterity. While making a strong plea for simplicity in education, it should not be understood that he stood for austerity and strict economy. He attached great importance to the proper training of the body and gave due attention to athletics. While doing so he wanted to revive the national games. There are in India many noble indigenous games which are just as interesting and exciting as cricket or football, also as much attended with risks as football is, with the added advantage that they are inexpensive and their cost is practically next to nothing. While he condemns the highly expensive Western education, he does not ignore one of the vital aspects of education—body-building. He encourages inexpensive Indian indigenous games for the masses.

In his talk to the women students of the Kasturba Balikashram, New Delhi, he drives home the idea of simplicity in a very succinct manner as follows: "You must make it as a rule to prefer walking to using a conveyance. Motor cars are not for the millions. You will therefore shun it. Millions cannot afford even a train journey. Their world is a village. It is a very small thing but if you faithfully adhere to this rule it will transform your entire life and fill it with a sweetness that natural sweetness carries with it. Education here won't qualify you for a luxurious life."²⁷

Further glimpses into his ideas of simplicity in education can be obtained in one of his articles in the *Harijan* wherein he observes: "A student's

life has been rightly likened to the life of a sanyasi. He must be the embodiment of simple living and high thinking. He must be discipline incarnate. His pleasure is derived from his studies. They do provide real pleasure. When study ceases to be a tax, the student has to pay. What can be a greater pleasure than that a student marches from knowledge to more knowledge."²⁸ From the above illustration it is quite clear that Gandhi aims at simplicity and high thinking in education.

By simplicity, he did not mean that man should rest content with a little knowledge but that he should aim at progressive improvement of his knowledge in a pleasurable manner. There are some who mistake his love of simplicity for his hatred of science. He was in fact a votary of truth wherever it might be found and therefore he never hated science. He valued education in the sciences for what they were worth. If too much of the sciences were not taught in the institutions in which he was interested they were due to the fact that the teaching of it involved enormous expenditure. Speaking about it he points out : "I value education in the different sciences. Our children cannot have too much of Chemistry and Physics. If these have not been attended to in the institutions in which I am directly supposed to be interested, it is because we have not the professors for the purpose and also because practical training in these sciences requires expensive laboratories for which in the present state of uncertainty and infancy, we are not ready."²⁹

Of course Gandhi spoke about the state of affairs in 1925 and it is no longer the same. Enormous progress has been achieved in India's economic

28. Page 297, *Ibid.*

29. Pages 23-24, *Towards New Education*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1953.

development and her financial conditions have improved greatly since 1925. Even if Gandhi were alive today, perhaps he might be prepared to revise his opinions regarding the necessity of giving practical training in the sciences. But yet, it is a fact today, as it was before, that scientific training involves enormous expenditure, which he thought was not desirable to be incurred on a large-scale in the interest of national economy. His observations in the interest of public economy are quite sound but yet the needs of the times are different, since they vary from time to time and the value of scientific and technical training cannot be completely ignored.

Out of his inordinate love of simplicity, Gandhi also thought that the climate of India did not require the imposing buildings which the English need. In his opinion, even with the best motives in the world, the English tutors cannot wholly understand the difference between English and Indian requirements. Since he wanted education to become universal, he thought that it would mean a revolution in educational methods. What kind of revolution would it be? He remarks: "When our children are admitted to schools, they need, no slate and pencil and books, but simple village tools, which they can handle freely and remuneratively."³⁰

Gandhi worked out the principle of *ahimsa* as part of education. When asked to shed light on the question, he remarked: "*Ahimsa* in relation to the life of a student stands quite apart from these questions of high politics. *Ahimsa* in education must have an obvious bearing on the mutual relations of the students. Where the whole atmos-

phere is redolent with the pure fragrance of *ahimsa*, boys and girls studying together will live like brothers and sisters in freedom and yet in self-imposed restraint; the students will be bound to the teachers in ties of filial love, mutual respect and mutual trust. This pure atmosphere will of itself be a continual object-lesson in *ahimsa*. The students brought up in such an atmosphere will always distinguish themselves by their charity and breadth of view and a special talent for service. Social evils will cease to present any difficulty to them, the very intensity of love being enough to burn out those evils. For instance the very idea of child-marriage will appear repugnant to them. They will not even think of penalizing the parents of brides by demanding dowries from them. And how dare they after marriage regard their wives as chattel or simply a means of gratifying their lust. How will a young man brought up in such an environment of *ahimsa* ever think of fighting a brother of his own or a different faith. At any rate no one will think of calling himself a votary of *ahimsa* and do all or any one of these things.”³¹

Gandhi's principle of *ahimsa* in education may seem platitudinous but when actually practised, it is one of the noblest ideals in education. Non-violence was not only a creed of Gandhi in his politics but it was a principle of life.

Speaking about the value of *ahimsa* in education he remarked : “*Ahimsa* is a weapon of matchless potency. It is the *summum bonum* of life. It is an attribute of the brave, in fact it is their all. It does not come within reach of the coward. It is no wooden or life less dogma but a living and life-giving force. It is a special attribute of the soul. That is why it has been described as the

31. Page 160, *To the Students*—M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1940.

highest *dharma* (law). In the hands of the educationist, therefore it ought to take the form of the purest love ever fresh, an over gushing spring of life expressing itself in every act. Ill-will cannot stand in its presence. The sun of *ahimsa* carries all the hosts of darkness such as hatred, anger and malice before himself. *Ahimsa* in education shines clear and far and can no more be hidden ever as the sun cannot be hidden by any means.”³²

It is more out of his love for *ahimsa* than anything else that he turned his eyes to soul-force and its immense possibilities in education. He wanted every one to arm himself with this matchless weapon of spirit-force by dint of self-discipline and self-purification. Deploring the appeal of material force which had gripped the attention of the masses, he rightly points out, “Modern education tends to turn our eyes away from the spirit. The possibilities of the spirit force or soul force therefore do not appeal to us and our eyes are consequently rivetted on the evanescent, transitory, material force. Surely this is the very limit of dull unimaginativeness.”³³

Gandhi deplored the mass ignorance more than mass illiteracy and therefore, for adult education he wanted to have an intensive programme of driving out ignorance through carefully selected teachers with an equally carefully selected syllabus according to which they would educate the adult villager's mind. In his scheme of adult education his aim is not to promote the mere spread of literacy, but to impart useful knowledge. That is not to say that he would not give them a knowledge of the alphabets. He valued it too much to despise or even belittle its merit as a vehicle of

32. Page 160, *Ibid.*

33. Page 190, *Ibid.*

education. According to Gandhi the primary need of those who are come of age and are following a profession is to know how to read and write. Therefore his interest in the liquidation of mass illiteracy was considerable. It was his belief that the literary campaign should not begin and end with a knowledge of the alphabet. It must go hand in hand with the spread of useful knowledge. He thought that a dry knowledge of the three R's was not, and could never be a permanent part of the villager's life.

One great problem that faces the adult literary worker today is how to enable the adults to retain the knowledge gained by them and prevent them from lapsing into illiteracy. Gandhi has thought deeply over the problem and has given his original solution which is of a constructive nature. According to him, the so-called lapse into illiteracy is bound to occur after the short courses that are given. The lapse, in his view, could only be prevented by correlating the teaching to the villagers' daily wants. They must have knowledge given to them which they must use daily. He wanted to give the villagers village arithmetic, village geography, village history and the literary knowledge that they must use daily, i.e., reading and writing. He was of opinion that they would treasure such knowledge and pass on to the other stages. He was not at all for thrusting knowledge upon the illiterate masses. They should have the natural aptitude for it. They find no use for books which would give them nothing of daily use. Therefore he was not satisfied with simply teaching the illiterates how to read and write. He observed that if only he had charge of adult education, he would begin with opening the minds of the adult pupils to the greatness and vastness of their country.

According to Gandhi complete adult education

must touch the life of the villager at all points—the economic, the hygienic, the social and the political. The immediate solution of the economic distress, in his view, would be the wheel in the majority of cases. The hygiene would include sanitation and disease. Gandhi expected the adult-literacy worker to dig trenches for burying excreta and other refuse and turning them into manure, clean wells and tanks, build easy embankments, remove rubbish and generally to make the villages more habitable. The village worker will also have to touch the social side and gently persuade the people to give up bad customs and bad habits—such as untouchability, infant marriage, unequal matches, drink and drug evil and many local superstitions. Lastly would come the political part. Here the worker interested in adult education will have to study the political grievances of the villagers and teach them the dignity of freedom, self-reliance and self-help in everything. This would make, in his opinion, complete education. Thus, according to Gandhi, in adult education, literary training forms but a part of the whole course in education and it is only a means to the large end as described above.

The Government of India has not yet discovered the type of adult education that will meet the needs of the country. The UNESCO Seminar on Rural Adult Education held in November-December, 1949, was in the nature of an exploration in this direction. Gandhi's constructive genius had already indicated how the thing could be made really simple. In a sense he had been engaged in the work of adult education ever since he started his public career in 1893 in South Africa. He continued his experiments even after his return to India in his Satyagraha Ashrama and at various places in Champaran. He put forward his programme of adult education as a national policy only in 1944

with a comprehensive programme of education of the masses. He unfolded the full scope of his educational programme in the Basic Education Conference of January, 1945, hitherto confined only to Basic Education, so as to include pre-Basic, post-Basic and Adult Education. He set Miss Shanta Nirulkar to work out the pattern of adult education in Sewagram, a small backward village in Madhya Pradesh, under his personal guidance as far as possible. The Sewagram experiment succeeded very well even during his lifetime. He had no time to continue his experiments due to the sudden outbreak of the communal violence in the country on the eve and in the wake of India's partition. He was seriously concerned with the problem of the refugees—feeding, housing and rehabilitating them. Then how did he solve the problem ?

He would begin tapping the tremendous creative power, lying suppressed within those helpless men. He approached the problem from the educational point of view. The basis of his programme was :

(a) That everybody should consider it a duty to labour in order to secure the right to food and shelter ;

(b) That everybody should practise self-help and self-sufficiency as far as possible ; and

(c) That co-operative building should be undertaken by the victims of the riots and their erstwhile oppressors of the devastated houses. Unfortunately Gandhi's ideas were not given a fair trial by the Government nor were there enough enthusiastic people to carry conviction to the refugees by their example and loving service.

The basic principles of adult education of Gandhi's conception are the same as those of Basic Education except for some inevitable difference of

approach due to the psychology and background of the adult being different from the child's. "He evolved a new system of education which would immediately lead to an efficient pursuit of the villager instead of being a distraction from it. Finding that the peasant could afford to lay aside his struggle for bread, he said that every struggle should be made the medium of education. He would overcome the apathy of the villager by approaching him from his point of view and beginning with his immediate interests. The two things of fundamental concern to the peasant are food and clothing. Therefore Gandhi began by making those two the pivots of education, thereby winning for his educational system the aid of powerful psychological and basic urges. By teaching them to tackle these problems in a scientific manner, entering into the why and wherefore of every process involved therein, Gandhi hoped to develop in the millions the scientific spirit, which was bound to affect their attitude to all aspects of life, resulting in its all-round improvement, without any outside financial help."³⁴ It was Gandhi's belief that wealth could be created in the process, by the application of enhanced intelligence to natural recourses which were lying in plenty near at their hands. All these changes and improvements, being affected by the individual himself, he believed, would give him self-confidence and a desire for further self-improvement. A healthy process, thus set into motion, according to him, would not stop with creating the sense of individual power but would be subsequently reinforced by turning it into collective power through co-operation.

Hence, in his opinion, mere literacy would be of no use to a village adult but an education through a

34. Page 6, *Building For Peace or Gandhi's Ideas on Social (Adult) Education*—Dev Parkash Nayyar, Atma Ram & Sons, Delhi.

craft alone would lead to sound education. He held the view that if arts and crafts were practised not mechanically but scientifically *i.e.*, with the knowledge of the why and wherefore of every process involved, the highest development of the mind would be possible through them. Usually, adult education, at least in practice, means mere literacy. But since true education according to him must prepare the adult for life, it should centre in some life activity. Therefore, in his view, mere literacy, without any relation to the everyday life activity of the villager will have no stability because there is no force of experience in it to keep it alive. That was the reason why Gandhi in his scheme of adult education rightly insisted that education should begin with some life activity and should continue through life activity throughout life. Such an education, he hoped would enable the village adults to lead better, fuller and richer lives both as individuals and as members of the community.

Any programme of adult education which does not infuse a sense of new power in the village adult and awaken him to understand his inherent strength and ability to solve his own problems, at least collectively if not singly, is a complete failure according to Gandhi. He wants every worker in adult education to realise that unless there is a complete change in the lives of the adults, the growing generation will be in social danger. The truth of his statement is true even to-day. The question is how to bring about that change and what should be the method.

Gandhi is quite aware of the difficulties in the path of effecting a change in the lives of the adults. It is a known fact that the life of an adult is already formed. His habits and his ways of life are fixed. Therefore it is difficult to change those

fixed habits unless he desires the change himself. So the first thing necessary is the awakening of the desire for change, for a healthy and active life and moral strength. Gandhi felt that it could only be done by developing that consciousness of power lying inherent in every man and woman however humble. He never loses faith in the poor and unhealthy creature, condemned to poverty, dirt, squalor and apathy.

Gandhi conceived of adult education as something extending from birth to death. As observed by Dev Parkash Nayyar, "Gandhi's conception of adult education was of an all-inclusive character. It began with the filling of bellies and ended with the establishment of a world order based on the principles of equality, brotherhood and peace, through non-violent means. So far as the individual was concerned, he felt that he had the right to receive education from the moment of conception to the moment of death."³⁵

According to Gandhi true education requires a proper atmosphere. Therefore in the matter of adult education also the same principle will hold good. In order to develop in adults the desired qualities, an atmosphere is needed of enterprise, self-reliance, honesty and enthusiasm to shoulder one's responsibilities, singly and collectively. He hoped that the creation of an atmosphere for collective effort to better the life of the individual, would in turn help in bringing about a change in the social order.

For Gandhi, another important point in adult education is the building up of character. He believes that if there is an example of good charac-

35. Page 31, *Building For Peace or Gandhi's Ideas on Social (Adult) Education*—Dev Parkash Nayyar, Atma Ram & Sons, Delhi.

ter before the adults, they will feel the moral strength in good character. Hence in his view the work of an adult education worker is to create an atmosphere of confidence, so that individuals may be spurred to action. In adult education he stresses the values of co-operation and co-ordination which are to be learnt through self-organisation and individual sharing of responsibilities. Thus he hopes, the spirit of the new social order will enter in every-day community life.

Some may think that there is no place for literacy in Gandhi's scheme of adult education. But it is not so. There is a particular stage at which he will introduce the teaching of the three R's to the adults. What is that stage? He would begin teaching of the three R's after having given the people the self-confidence that their improvement lies in their hands which would give them a strong incentive for education of the right type.

It is only at this stage he would put into their possession permanently in the form of the written word the knowledge which they had already gained through the spoken word and the usefulness of which they had already tested. That, he hoped, would assist their comprehension and would be attractive enough to induce the villagers to pay for books and other things.

Such knowledge he believed, would appear before them as power, as the key to unlock opportunities and advantages lying at their doorsteps and to solve the vital problem confronting them.

Therefore, Gandhi sets great store by the co-operation of the people to the success of his educational programme. After having won it, he would proceed to the more difficult task of teaching them the laws of health and hygiene, about keeping

the village clean and a scientific knowledge of village sanitation.

Gandhi wanted to revolutionise collegiate education and relate it to national necessities. According to him, technical training of a highly specialised nature like Engineering should be given in the different industries and they should pay for the training of the graduates whom they would need.

Thus for instance the Tatas would be expected to run a college for training engineers under the supervision of the State; and the mill associations would run among them a college for training graduates whom they need. Similarly for other industries. Commerce will have its own college just as arts, medicine and agriculture. He wanted the medical colleges to be attached to certified hospitals and since they are popular among moneyed people, they might be expected by voluntary contribution to support medical colleges. Agricultural colleges also should be self-supporting, in his opinion. From his experience he finds that the knowledge of agricultural graduates is superficial and that they lack practical experience; but if they had their apprenticeship on farms which will be self-sustained and answer the needs of the country, they would not have to gain experience after getting their degrees and that too at the expense of their employers. This seemed to Gandhi to be a very reasonable and practicable solution of the problem of education.

He does not favour students going abroad for higher studies. From his experience he has discovered that many of those who have qualified themselves in foreign countries found themselves to be misfits.

Therefore, he rightly remarks : "I have

never been an advocate of our students going abroad. My experience tells me that such, on return, find themselves, to be square pegs in round holes. That experience is the richest and contributes most to growth which springs from the soil. But today the craze for going abroad has gripped students."³⁶ Therefore, Gandhi thinks that what the people learn in foreign countries is not of any use to them when they come back to India since it has to be adapted to Indian conditions. It requires further education.

It is his opinion that higher education should be left purely to private enterprise and for meeting national requirements whether in the various industries, technical arts, belles-letters or fine arts. Therefore Gandhi does not favour the State running the universities or meeting the expenses of higher education. He looks at State Universities as purely examining bodies and wants them to be self-supporting through the fees that will be charged for examinations. He would like to invest universities with greater powers than now, so that their province might be extended to the whole of the field of education. They will be expected to prepare and approve courses of studies in the various departments of education. According to him, not even a single private school should be run without the prior sanction and approval of the respective universities. He does not stand in the way of private individuals of proved worth and integrity being given the liberty to start and run universities of their own, provided that the universities will not cost the State anything except that it will undertake the responsibility of running a Central Education Department. According to him the foregoing scheme would not entirely absolve the State from running such seminars as might be required for supplying State needs.

36. Pages 294-295, *To the Students*—M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

Thus, Gandhi is definite in his view that collegiate or higher education should vest entirely in the hands of private individuals and not the State.

It must not be understood that he was an enemy of Higher Education as such. Far from it he was opposed only to the prevailing system of Higher Education in the country which was given in a foreign language. The enormity of the damage done as a result of such teaching has been too much, which according to him, has caused incalculable intellectual and mental injury to the nation. Those who had received such education had both to be victims and judges—an almost impossible feat. It is Gandhi's firm conviction that the vast amount of the so-called education, especially in arts, given in colleges is nothing but sheer waste. It has resulted in unemployment among the educated classes. And to add to it, it has destroyed the health both mental and physical, of the boys and girls who had the misfortune to go through the regular grind in colleges.

In the columns of the *Harijan* he explicitly states :

“(1) I am not opposed to education even of the highest type attainable in the world.

(2) The State must pay for it wherever it has definite use for it.

(3) I am opposed to all higher education being paid for from the general revenue.”³⁷

Thus it will be obvious to the reader that Gandhi is not an enemy of Higher Education as such but what he opposes is the prevailing system of the country with its attendant evils.

37. Page 76, *Towards New Education*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1953.

The fact that he does not underrate the importance of Higher Education, especially in the technical subjects becomes quite apparent when he observes :

“Under my scheme there will be more and better libraries, more and better laboratories, and more and better research institutes. Under it we should have an army of chemists, engineers and other experts who will be real servants of the nation and answer the varied and growing requirements of a people who are becoming increasingly conscious of their rights and wants. And all these experts will speak, not a foreign language but the language of the people. The knowledge gained by them will be the common property of the people. There will be truly original work instead of mere imitation. And the cost will be evenly and justly distributed.”³⁸ Just as he pleads for the vernacular medium in schools both at the primary and secondary levels, so also he makes a strong plea for the same medium in higher education also. He does not want the benefits of higher education to go to waste but he desires that the knowledge of the sciences and technical subjects gained by experts shall be commonly shared among the people.

Gandhi would have nothing to say against higher education when it is directly based on realities and is wholly given through the mother-tongue. So long as it is not connected with realities, it could not be of benefit either to the individual or to the State. In his opinion there could be no such individual benefit which could not be proved to be also national benefit. Therefore for Gandhi, University training becomes self-supporting when it is profitably utilised by the State.

What, however, according to his view, the State would not have, was an army of B.A.'s and M.A.'s with their brains completely sapped with too much cramming and minds almost paralysed by the impossible attempt to speak and write English like Englishmen, the majority of whom find no work, no employment. The situation is not far different even today.

So long as the type and system of Higher Education continues to be the same, he does not favour its expenses being met or borne from the general revenue. The State will pay only for that kind of Higher Education which is based on realities and is wholly given through the mother-tongue. According to him, for Higher Education to be based on realities, is to be based on national, i.e., state requirements. Voluntary contributions, he thought, could be forthcoming for conducting many institutions of Higher Education, even when that happy time came. That too, may or may not benefit the State. In his view, much of what passes for education today belongs to that category and would therefore be not paid for from the general revenue.

Gandhi wanted to re-orient University Education and to have it originally related to the Indian scene. He would completely overhaul and scrap the prevailing system which has enslaved the students and remodel it on new lines, consonant with the national requirements. The central point of his thesis is that University Education must be an extension and continuation of the Basic Education course. According to him, the aim of University Education should be to turn out true servants of the people who would live and die for the country's freedom. He is therefore of opinion that University Education should be co-ordinated and brought into line with Basic Education by taking in teachers from the Talimi Sangh.

He anticipated the linguistic political redistribution of provinces even as early as 1947 and believed that their separate administration would naturally lead to the establishment of Universities in separate States wherever there were none. He did believe that there should be such Universities if the rich provincial languages of India and the people who spoke them were to attain their full height. He rightly observed that there should be a proper background for new Universities and he felt that they should have feeders in the shape of schools and colleges wherein instructions will be given through the medium of their respective provincial languages. Then only, he thought, could there be a proper millen. A University being always at the top, a majestic top can be sustained only if there is a sound foundation.

He does not like huge amounts of money being spent on mere imposing buildings for Universities. It is his belief that "A University never needs a pile of majestic buildings and treasures or gold and silver. What it does need most of all is the intelligent backing of public opinion. It should have a large reservoir of teachers to draw upon. Its founders should be far-seeing."³⁹ He wants Universities of free India to be broad-based on popular will and support so that everything will go from bottom upward and hence will last. In his opinion, it is not the duty of a democratic State to find the wherewithal for founding Universities. If the people wanted them, they would themselves supply the necessary funds. He sets the people an important task of making an earnest and sincere attempt at producing a beautiful blend of different Indian cultures which the new Universities might strive to perpetuate and increasingly strengthen and shape.

39. Page 81, *Towards New Education*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1953.

It does not matter what form or shape it will ultimately take. But anyhow, in the opinion of Gandhi, an experience in this direction on the part of the seekers after truth will be very helpful when the time is ripe for founding new Universities. Thus the important function of a University, according to Gandhi, is to make an attempt to bring about an integration and synthesis of different Indian cultures and thereby strengthen national unity and not arouse or fan the fire of inter-state conflicts and prejudices, affecting the unity of India as a whole.

SECTION VIII

The Philosophic Undercurrents in Gandhi's Educational Ideas

Humanism :

Gandhi's approach of the individual in his system of education is humanistic. He had great faith in the sanctity of human worth and in his great potentialities, capable of mastering his own destiny. The system or order of society which Gandhi wanted to establish through his system of education was based on respect for human nature and also on the desirability of providing it an environment most favourable to its health and growth. His aim was to establish villages which will be self-sufficient and constitute the real basis of the future decentralised democratic state, resting on truth and non-violence. He wanted man to be free in the true sense of the term and therefore, mere freedom to vote without economic freedom, in his opinion was an illusion and a misnomer, incompatible with true democracy. Hence, according to Gandhi, maximum decentralization of economy was essential to prevent exploitation of the common man by vested interests.

One of the common beliefs that has gone round is, that Gandhi's system based on cottage industries and decentralized economy, spells the destruction of all scientific progress that the age has made so far. The truth, however, is that Gandhi was never against Science. He had in fact the greatest admiration for the tremendous scientific progress that the West has made and he wanted every bit of it. But at the same time, he wanted to be the master of

Science and not its slave, to harness it to the good of mankind, not to allow it to become an instrument of human destruction. He was dissatisfied with the haphazard development of Science, unrelated to the social and economic structure of India. He has been a witness of the results of scientific development which has steeped the masses in chaos. Therefore, his desire was to substitute for this unscientific research in Science, a planned and humanized research which would take into account the social and economic factors, so that scientific research might subserve human progress, instead of being its destroyer. His aim was to bring down Science from the so called mountain tops where it was monopolised by the few, in the interests of the few and reduce it to the terms of the masses. In his speech at Science Institute, Bangalore, Gandhi observed: "I tell you, you can devise a far greater wireless instrument which does not require external research, but internal—and all research will be useless, if it is not allied to internal research which can link your hearts with those of the masses. Unless all the discoveries you make have the welfare of the poor as the end in view, all your workshops will be really no better than Satan's workshops, as Rajagopalachari said in joke.¹" The above is an instance of Gandhi's humanism in his educational philosophy.

In his autobiography, one gets glimpses into the humanistic tendencies in his philosophy of education. It is evident in his opposition to corporal punishment. In his various educational experiments, he has never resorted to corporal punishment as one of the best means of maintaining discipline, excepting only once in his life. But he used to repent for the violence of his deed in having once picked up a ruler lying at hand and for having

1. Pages 101-102, *To The Students* M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1949.

delivered a blow on the arm of one of the inmates of the Tolstoy Farm, who was always wild, unruly, given to lying and quarrelsome. Later he used to feel and realize that he had exhibited before the student that day, not the spirit, but the brute in him. Therefore, he has always been opposed to corporal punishment and thus in his endeavour to impart spiritual training to the boys and girls under his charge, he came to understand better and better the power of the spirit. This is another example of Gandhi's humanism.

Idealism :

In the writings of Mahatma Gandhi the idealistic tendencies are quite perceptible. In fact they are dominant. In the Tolstoy Farm which Gandhi founded in 1910, the Satyagrahis and their children used to practise a sort of Spartan life. During this period he had to undertake some responsibility in connection with education of the young boys and girls in his charge. There he always tried to impress upon the students the need of practising the art of self-control, since morality was one of the keynotes of his life. Idealistic tendencies are present in his gospel of Brahmacharya, which he has never been tired of preaching, without which he thought, no man could really turn himself into an efficient servant of mankind. It was his insistence on continence which frequently brought Gandhi in conflict with those who held a different view on the subject. His frequent emphasis on the building up of a sound character in education is another instance of the idealistic tendency in his educational philosophy.

He held the view that a purely literary education would not lead one to the rear of reality. Therefore he stressed the necessity of a cultural education. He cared more for moral values in

education than for mere knowledge of letters. His outlook on life was intensely idealistic. He realized that the training of the spirit was a thing by itself and to develop the spirit was to build character and to enable one to work towards the knowledge of God and self-realization. He held the culture of the heart to be an essential part of the training of the young and that all training without culture of the spirit was of no use to him and might be even harmful.

Idealism does form the core of Gandhi's philosophy of education. Is it not found reflected in his ultimate aim of education which is nothing but self-realization? When he says that education is that which liberates, he means by that, the liberation of man from all kinds of bondages so that it might lead him to a higher life a life of the spirit. Since self-realization was his ultimate aim of education, he would never defer preparation for a life of renunciation to the fourth stage of life. According to him, true education should enable a man to lead a life of renunciation, dedicated to the service of humanity throughout one's life and preparation for such an invaluable experience should by no means be deferred to the last stage of one's life, when, not self-realization, but old age amounting to a second and pitiable childhood would creep in. He held those views even while he was teaching in 1911-12, though he might not then have expressed them in educational language.

The very fact that he held the balanced and harmonious development of the body, mind and spirit as one of the important aims of education itself testifies to the idealism in his educational philosophy. It shows that he does not ignore the training of either the body or the intellect or the spirit but considers the training of them all to be very essential for a higher life.

He restores the child, in his education to the proper place and accords him the human dignity that is legitimate. He looks upon the child as a spark of the divine, possessing immense potentialities of development. Therefore, in his philosophy of education, the child is the centre of educational progress and not the subject matter or the mere acquisition of knowledge. He holds education to be the birth-right of each and all and in his opinion, the aim of education is the natural, progressive and harmonious development of the powers and capacities, a human being is capable of. That was why it became his educational ideal, that universal compulsory primary education should be introduced in India.

By stressing the value of religious education for each individual, his claim as an idealist in education becomes a reasonable one. He wanted every child to be familiar with the fundamental tenets of all faiths, so that they might get a broad outlook and have a tolerant attitude towards other religions, besides a good appreciation of one's own religion. Religion was a way of life for Gandhi and therefore true religion was not divorced from any aspect of life.

Similarly his idealism finds expression in his ideas on freedom. He always emphasised self-discipline and according to him, the highest form of freedom carries with it the greatest measure of discipline and humility. Unbridled licence is a sign of vulgarity, injurious alike to self and one's neighbours and freedom that comes from discipline and humility cannot be denied.

The fact that he is an idealist to the core becomes obvious when he says, that his creed is not a narrow one but that of realizing the essential brotherhood of man. Therefore, real education,

according to Gandhi, should bring about unity of all life, by cultivating absolute purity of heart. In his opinion, true education brings a man nearer to God in the least possible time.

By stressing the importance of atmosphere in education, he becomes a true idealist. He never fails to emphasise the value of proper environment for enabling each child to develop his latent powers and stimulate them to their fullest development. The very fact that he has chosen the term 'Ashrama' for the various centres in which he conducted his educational experiments is a proof to the high regard he had for a proper environment—physical and social, in shaping a man's nature.

Realism :

Gandhi had a keen sense of realism. His principle of education was the education of the whole personality of man and it was based on his discovery that it was not what was poured into a person's mind through written or spoken word but the way in which he tackled the basic urges of his life conditioning his thinking and his individual and social behaviour. In spite of his being an idealist in education, yet he always insisted that education must be self-supporting, activity-centred and that it should lead to the harmonious development of personality. He was a realist to the core in the sense that he had no faith in preaching things which could not be practised, whether it be imparting spiritual training, administering discipline or imparting sex education.

Gandhi had not much use for things which the masses could not practice. He realized the cruellest irony of western education, which was purely literary and academic, not suiting the genius of the people of the country. According to him, good ethics

must also be good economics and true economics never militates against the highest ethical standard. His plan of self-supporting education through a rural craft, which has since been accepted, at least partially, by the country, is only one among several instances of his realistic tendency in education.

There is much in common between the realism of Gandhi and the pragmatist approach. A pragmatist wants the child to acquire everything for himself, be it, knowledge or skills, necessary to deal effectively with life situations. When Gandhi defines education as education for life through life, then it is definitely a preparation for life—for future, through situations of real life. Similarly, quite in common with pragmatism, Gandhi's scheme of education is purposive, experimental and activity-centred. Just like the pragmatist, Gandhi emphasises learning by doing, and distrusts mere bookishness and believes that the child learns far more from his own activity than from mere repeated instructions. By making learning craft-centred and all other learning being made possible through proper correlation, he tried to integrate school studies with the world outside so that the school might become a miniature society.

According to a pragmatist, a truth must be capable of being experimentally verified. Gandhi also similarly believed that whatever truth was capable of verification was relative Truth. Just like the Scientist, he claimed no finality or absoluteness for such a truth. Only one claim he made for his conclusions and it was, that whatever seemed to be absolutely correct, seemed to be for the time being final. For, if they were not, he should base no action on them. His keen sense of realism is obvious at every step of experiments that he has carried out—the process of acceptance or rejection, and he acted accordingly. But he ceases

to be a pragmatist when he talks about Absolute Truth, for which he needs no verification.

Just as he did not tolerate social injustice in any form, similarly he objected to any divorce taking place between thinking and doing. In the schools of his conception, no divorce of such a nature was to take place. His school must be a doing school as well as a thinking school. He thought of education as a whole process in which effort and interest are not opposed to each other but inter-related. He believes that proper interest could be secured in learning a craft when it is taught scientifically and not mechanically, and learnt with sincerity.

Like the pragmatist, he infuses a purpose in all learning without which, it is useless to him. He seeks in his scheme of education, to relate all knowledge quite significantly to the life of the people. In fact, he infuses a social purpose in education.

Gandhi's keen sense of realism is distinct through his introduction of a basic craft at the centre of education, the correlation and co-ordination of which is absolutely necessary for effective learning — a method based on life situations.

Naturalism :

Gandhi is not an outright naturalist ; but yet his writings do contain certain gems of thought which entitle him to an honourable place among the naturalistic philosophers in education. Quite like Rousseau, he protests against an artificial system of education. Dissatisfied with the hostile atmosphere around the students which they had to fight, he rightly observed : "Instead of the sacred surroundings of a Rishi Guru's ashrama and his

paternal care, he has the atmosphere of a broken down home and the artificial surroundings created by the modern system of education. The rishis taught the pupils without books. They only gave them a few mantras which the pupils treasured in their memories and translated in practical life. The present-day student has to live in the midst of a heap of books, sufficient to choke him."² Thus Gandhi deprecates the artificiality in education and makes a strong plea for restoring the child to his natural and rightful place.

Just like Rousseau, he stood for freedom in education, born of self-discipline. Hence he hates all kinds of restrictions which stand in the way of a man's free self-expression. The reason why he hates text-books is because they burden the minds of the children, giving no scope for originality. Even in the matter of discipline, he was never for imposing it from outside. He was a believer in self-discipline. By making a plea for simplicity he restores Nature to its proper place. He protested against the prevailing system of education because it was not suited to the genius of the people of the country. He deplored very much that there was no correspondence between the education given and the home life and village life. By emphasising the need for a proper atmosphere, by stressing the value of environment in education, by making education activity-centred, by introducing industrial training in education as a compulsory part, his claim to be a naturalistic philosopher in education becomes valid.

His principle of ahimsa in education is another instance which entitles him to a similar claim. By ahimsa in education, he meant a natural and mutual relationship among the students. According to him where the whole atmosphere is redolent with

2. Page 60, *To the Students*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House. Ahmedabad, 1949.

the pure fragrance of ahimsa, boys and girls, studying together, will live like brothers and sisters, in freedom and yet in self-restraint ; the students would bound together to the teachers in ties of filial love, mutual respect and mutual trust.

Like Rousseau, Gandhi believes that Nature and rural environments are great potential agents in education. That was the reason why he accorded a place of greater honour to the life of a villager than that of an industrial worker. He held Nature in such high honour that he wanted to rid the villages of the evils of urbanization. He wanted to persuade the students to make village life their goal rather than city life. In this connection he observes :

“We are inheritors of a rural civilization. The vastness of our country, the vastness of the population, the situation and the climate of the country have destined it for a rural civilization. Its defects are well-known but not one of them is irremediable. To uproot it and substitute for it an urban civilization seems to me an impossibility, unless we are prepared by some drastic means to reduce the population from three hundred million to three or say even thirty. I can therefore suggest remedies on the assumption that we must perpetuate the present rural civilization and to endeavour to rid it of its acknowledged defects. This can only be done if the youth of the country will settle down to village life.”³ Thus, from the above analysis, it will be found, that Gandhi’s passion for a natural life in rural setting was really great. He wanted the student, during the vacation to penetrate the villages wherein he found unlimited scope for service, research and true knowledge. Only out of his love for Nature, must he have prescribed to the students

3. P. 187, *To The Students*—M.K Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, Sept., 1949.

educative outings in the villages and not burdensome literary studies during the vacation. Naturalistic tendencies are found lying scattered in his writings whenever he shows his aversions to knowledge being acquired by memorizing books or his hatred of all kinds of pedantry in learning.

He makes a strong plea for relating education to one's surroundings. He regrets that text-books of the day do not deal with things the boys and girls have always to deal with in their homes, but things to which they are perfect strangers. He feels very sorry that a boy or girl is never taught to have any pride in his or her surroundings. Protesting against the artificial system of western education, Gandhi pertinently observes: "The higher he goes, the farther he is removed from his home, so that at the end of his education, he becomes estranged from his surroundings. He feels no poetry about the home-life. The village scenes are a sealed book to him. His own civilization is presented to him as imbecile, barbarous, superstitious and useless for all practical purposes. His education is calculated to wean him from his traditional culture. And if the mass of educated youths are not denationalized, it is because the ancient culture is too deeply imbedded in them to be altogether uprooted even by an education adverse to its growth. If I had my way, I would certainly destroy the majority of the present text-books and cause to be written text-books which have a bearing on and correspondence with the home life, so that a boy as he learns may react upon his immediate surroundings."⁴

Does not the above observation illustrate a strong undercurrent of naturalistic tendency running through his educational philosophy ?

4. P. 29, *Towards New Education*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1949.

PART II

In education, the most important factor must be the inspiring atmosphere of creative activity. And therefore, the primary function of our University should be the constructive work of knowledge. Men should be brought together and full scope given to them for their work of intellectual exploration and creation ; and the teaching should be like the overflow water of this spring of culture, spontaneous and inevitable. Education can only become natural and wholesome when it is the direct fruit of a living and growing knowledge.

The great use of education is not merely to collect facts, but to know man and to make oneself known to man. It is the duty of every human being to master, at least to some extent, not only the language of intellect, but also that personality which is the language of Art. It is a great world of reality for man, vast and profound,—this growing world of his own creative nature. This is the world of Art.

Rabindranath Tagore.

SECTION I

Tagore's Early Education

Rabindranath Tagore did not have regular schooling—the kind of school and collegiate training which are ordinarily considered necessary for a boy of a respectable family. In his early days, he was anxious to go to school because he wanted to escape the imprisonment in the house. But when he actually began to attend school, he soon found to his great surprise that he had made a great mistake. The school became another prison, much more dreary than home.

Later, he realised the truth of the statement of his tutor that whereas he was crying to go to school in his childhood, he would have to cry a lot more to be let off later on.

Whenever he speaks of his school days, it is full of the feeling of a man who has suffered much and needlessly in his own boyish experience and had sought a cure for so deterrent and mortifying a discipline in the case and for the sake of others.

What made Tagore get a bad impression of a school must have been due to his own personal experiences in the school. Perhaps, the atmosphere of the school of his days and the methods of teaching and punishment adopted might have impressed on him as unwholesome and brutal. Therefore, it seemed possible, later on for Tagore, to find a more natural way of education by going back to instinct and going on to a new and better understanding of the imaginative and human needs of the growing boy.

First, Tagore attended the Oriental Seminary and from there he went to the Normal School. His memories of the Normal School are not the least sweet in any particular. He was not much impressed with the manners and habits of most of the boys, which were very nasty. He was greatly displeased with the atmosphere of the school, namely the hard benches and dull prison-like walls which shut the pupils from ten to four. "The Master", says Rabindranath, "looked like a cane incarnate."¹ No one then tried to make school-life interesting or pleasant for children. When a boy was unable to repeat his lessons, he was made to stand on a bench with arms extended and on his upward palms were piled a number of slates. Further, it seems that in those days, it was the common practice in Bengal for everything to be taught in English. Naturally, Tagore found little interest in his school lessons. Describing his uneasiness, he points out, "So, in the intervals of the classes I would go up to the second storey and while away the time sitting near a window overlooking the street. I would count : one year—two years—three years—wondering how many such would have to be got through like this."² Another unpleasant feature of the school life of his days was the foul language of one of his teachers.

Therefore, out of sheer contempt for the teacher, Rabindranath would refuse to answer any one of his questions. Describing how he spent his time in school, Tagore observes : "Thus I sat silent throughout the year at the bottom of his class and while the rest of his class was busy, I would be left

1. Page 10, *Rabindranath Tagore*—Marjorie Sykes, Longmans Green and Co., 1947.

2. Page 33, *Reminiscences*—Rabindranath Tagore, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1954.

alone, to attempt the solution of many an intricate problem." 3

On leaving the Normal School, he was sent to the Bengal Academy, a Eurasian institution. Tagore's memories of the Bengal Academy are as cruel and dismal as those of the Normal School. A glimpse into the Bengal Academy can be had in the picture depicted by Tagore himself when he says : "The rooms were cruelly dismal with their walls on guard like policemen. The house was more like a pigeon-holed box than a human habitation. No decoration, no pictures, not a touch of colour, not an attempt to attract the boyish heart. The fact that likes and dislikes form a large part of the child's mind was completely ignored. Naturally our whole being was depressed as we stepped through its doorway into the narrow quadrangle—and playing truant became chronic with us." 4 In the Bengal Academy, he resorted to all manner of subterfuges.

Some time later on, Tagore went on a journey to the Himalayas with his father and spent the most impressionable period of his life there—away from the Bengal Academy and off to the Himalayas. Soon after his return, he found it all the more difficult to resume his studies at school. Then his father tried to put him at St. Xavier's but the result was no better. Therefore, Tagore was obliged to learn a good deal in his very early years through a number of tutors that were arranged for him by his father. Even then the studies were so burdensome to him that he felt as though from morning till night the mills of learning went on grinding. Humorously he points out : "In this way all through the morning, studies of all kinds were heaped on me, but as the burden grew greater, my

3. Page 33, *Ibid.*

4. Pages 60—61 *Ibid.*

mind contrived to get rid of fragments of it ; making a hole in the enveloping net my parrot-learning slipped through its meshes and escaped.....”⁵ He was perfectly convinced that the greater part of the cargo with which the tutor sought to load his mind tipped out of the boat and was sent to the bottom. At any rate, he felt that his learning was a profitless cargo. In this connection, he remarks : “If one tries to key an instrument to too high a pitch, the strings will snap beneath the strain.”⁶ The same truth, he points out, can apply to the human being also.

Since Rabindranath had to learn a good deal through the tutors, it was rather too much of a strain and a mental load for a boy of his age and naturally, he felt very uneasy when forced to study.

He vividly describes his inertia as such : “As I read I nod, then jerk myself again with a start but miss far more than I read. When finally I tumble into bed I have at least a little time to call my own.”⁷ Thus, Tagore was overburdened with too much of knowledge that he found it hard to digest and assimilate what was taught him, nor was he free to learn things in his own way.

Neither the school nor the home atmosphere was encouraging for his proper studies. In both places, learning was made a task. School life seemed to have been wearisome for him since it grabbed the best part of the day. Describing the unfavourable atmosphere of the school, he points out : “As soon as I entered the class-room, the benches and tables forced themselves rudely on my

5. Page 41, *My Boyhood Days*—Rabindranath Tagore, Vishwa-Bharati, Calcutta, 1945.

6. Page 33, *Ibid.*

7. Page 43, *Ibid.*

attention, elbowing and jostling their way into my mind. They were always the same—stiff, cramping and dead.”⁸ Similarly at home, there was no freedom for Tagore to go his own way. Therefore he was rather forced to express that it was not any one’s fault but his own, that nothing could keep him for many days together in the beaten-track of learning. He was also constrained to stray at his will, filling his wallet with whatever gleanings of knowledge he chanced upon. Therefore, the cramping atmosphere of both the school and the home made him long for freedom and he reacted very seriously to the rigidity of the educational system under which he was brought up. Even though he did not stay in school for a long period, he considered himself singularly fortunate in having escaped the school training which would otherwise have set up for him an artificial standard based on the prescription of the school-master.

His bitter and unpleasant experiences both at school and at home during private studies convinced him of the necessity and need for introducing freedom in education. He expresses the same idea as follows : “some people get hammered into shape in the book-learning factories and these are considered in the market to be goods of a superior stamp. It was my fortune to escape almost entirely the impress of these mills of learning.”⁹

In another place he expresses the similar truth as such : “Though I did not have to serve the penal full term which men of my position have to undergo to find their entrance into cultured society, I am glad that I did not altogether escape from its molestation. For, it has given me knowledge of the wrong from which the children of men suffer. The cause of it is this, that man’s intention is going

8. Page 53, *Ibid.*

9. Page 84, *Ibid.*

against God's intention as to how children should grow into knowledge."¹⁰

These experiences led Tagore from his early days to seek guidance for his own self-expression in his own inner standard of judgment. But the medium of expression, throughout his early education and throughout his life was doubtlessly his mother tongue.

Just as Tagore had been attending school at least for some time in India though not for a continuous period, similarly, he had once an occasion to go to England for higher studies. He went to England for a regular course of study, and a desultory start was made, but it came to nothing. A number of friends and relatives were there and his own family circle absorbed nearly all his interest. Therefore, he was not much interested in the lessons of the school in England. He hung about around the school-room, a master used to teach him at the house, but yet, he did not give his mind to his studies.

However, gradually, the atmosphere of England made its impression on his mind and what little he brought back from that country was more from the people he came in contact with than from mere knowledge of the books. Then, he was admitted to London University where a natural interest in studies was created by the teachers there. One peculiar feature in teaching in London University which appealed much to him was that teaching was not dry-as-dust exposition of dead books, as far as English literature was concerned, in which he was much interested even then. It seems that he was able to study in the University of London for three months only, but yet he obtained almost all his under-

10. *My School*—Rabindranath Tagore, Pamphlet No. 1 Vishwa-Bharati.

standing of English culture from personal contacts, which are invaluable. He did not confine himself within the fenced-off regions of college studies ; it was not prescribed class study, and his understanding of human nature developed side by side with his knowledge of literature. Of course, he went to England with a specific purpose, to qualify himself for a barrister ; but he did not become a barrister since fortune decreed for him something else—to become a great poet and an educationist of international repute.

SECTION II

Tagore's Philosophy of Education

The first question that may be asked is what urged Tagore to take up education. He had spent most of his time in literary pursuits till he was forty or more. He had never any desire to take part in practical work, because he had a rooted conviction in his mind that he had not the gift. It is a historical fact as well as a truth, that he finished going to school even while he was thirteen. So long as he was forced to go to school, he felt its tortures unbearable. He often used to count the years that must pass before he could find his freedom. He even wished that by some magic spell he could cross the intervening fifteen or twenty years and suddenly become a grown-up man. He afterwards used to realise that what then weighed heavily on his mind was the unnatural pressure of the system of education, which prevailed everywhere.

Tagore's philosophy of education is therefore, a result of the memory of his school days, when the school resembled an education factory,—lifeless, colourless, dissociated from the context of the universe, within bare white walls staring like the eyeballs of the dead.

In the school days of his time, boys were not allowed freedom to take delight in activities; they were fettered and imprisoned, stifled by a force called discipline, which in turn killed the sensitiveness of the child-mind—the mind, which is always on the alert, restless and eager to receive first-hand knowledge from Mother Nature. He disliked the idea of children, sitting inert, like dead specimens

of some museum, while lessons are being pelted at them from high like hailstones on flowers.

Being a naturalist, he is keenly aware of children's sensitivity to the influences of the great world in which they have been born. He knows that their subconscious mind is active, always imbibing some lesson and with it realising the joy of knowledge. He further believed that the extraordinary sensitiveness of the children's mind would make easy their introduction to the great world of reality and also make it joyful.

Like the Gestalt psychologist, he believes that the children imbibe their lessons with the aid of their whole body and mind, with all the senses fully active and eager. Therefore, he deprecates the school, wherein the doors of natural information are closed to the children—children missing the perpetual stream of ideas which come straight from the heart of nature. Tagore believed that children should be surrounded with natural things which have their own natural value. According to Tagore, the minds of children should be allowed to stumble on and be surprised at everything that happens in the day-to-day life.

In this respect, he is a great practical educational philosopher like Prof. John Dewey. Just like Rousseau, he does not want purposefulness, which belongs to the adult-mind, to be forced upon the children in school. When once purposefulness is introduced, it becomes a torture to the child, because, it goes against Nature's purpose. In his view, Nature is the greatest of all teachers for the child and therefore, there should be as little of interference as possible at every step by the human teacher in the matter of, and in the process of the child's learning. The reason why he distrusts very much the human teacher is because he

believes more in machine-made lessons than in lessons of life, so that the whole growth of the child's mind is not only hurt but forcibly spoilt.

Therefore, he had great faith in the educational value of natural objects. It was his conviction that the new to-morrow would stimulate the attention of the children with new facts of life and hence it would be the best method for the child.

He hates the idea of a dull routine in a school—that every day at the same hour, the same book is brought and poured out for the child.

He wants the attention of children to be hit by chances of surprises from Nature—the coming of morning, heralded by music and flowers and the beautiful sunset, leaving deep marks on the children's minds.

Tagore believed that children had the natural gift of learning things very easily, which the adults completely ignore. He thought that with children every new fact or event would come to a mind that was always open, with abundant hospitality; and through such exuberant, indifferent acceptance that they learnt innumerable facts within a very short time, perhaps even amazing when compared with the slowness, with which the adults learnt. Since he had a great faith in the children's natural way of learning, he would not insist on forced mental feeding as a result of which lessons become a form of torture. He considers artificial feeding of the mind to be of man's most cruel and most wasteful mistakes.

Tagore wants children to have their own freedom to grow, which according to him, is the greatest possible gift for the child life. In his educational institution, Tagore also aimed at

another kind of freedom—the freedom of sympathy with all humanity, a freedom from all racial and national prejudices. He tried to save the children from such vicious methods of alienating their minds and also from other prejudices fostered through books, histories, geographies and lessons full of national prejudices. He sought by his methods of education to free the minds of children, usually shut inside prison-houses, so that they might become capable of understanding other people with different languages and customs. In his opinion, the worst of fetters come only when children lose their freedom of mind.

Thus it may be seen that Tagore's philosophy of education is based on the ideal of the spiritual unity of all races. He had in his mind not merely a university, which was only one aspect of Viswa-Bharati, but the idea of a great meeting-place for individuals from all countries, where men who believed in spiritual unity could come together into human touch with their neighbours. His institution of Viswa-Bharati, represents the ideal of co-operation of the spiritual unity of man. It was his belief that it was co-operation and love, mutual trust and mutual aid which made for strength and real progress in civilization, and not mere science or its advancement. He wanted a new spiritual and moral power to be continually developed in order to enable men to assimilate their scientific gains, to control their new weapons and machines; otherwise, he thought, they would dominate, enslave and slay men. According to Rabindranath, the world of mere science is not a world of reality, but an abstract impersonal world of force. Having been a witness to the first and second World War, he saw its disastrous consequences and therefore he began to distrust the modern civilization of vast power in which men have been losing their freedom; their humanity and their lives in order to fit them-

selves for vast mechanical organisations—scientific, political, economic and military.

He therefore seems to be right in characterising modern civilisation as the nemesis of science, dominant over, rather than subservient to, the spirit of man. That was why, he set at a discount, value of success obtained at the cost of humanity and if it made a desert of the God's world.

He continued to believe in an education for peace and love and kindness and ideals, though at the cost of martyrdom, insult and suffering of which he was himself a victim. Such was his faith in the spiritual unity of man which he sought to achieve in his educational institution of Viswa-Bharati.

Tagore wanted to make his children as happy as possible and give them as much freedom as he could in his institution. When children found themselves in an atmosphere of freedom and trust, they never gave him any trouble. From the first, he trusted them and they always responded to his trust. His main aim was to find his own freedom in a larger world of men and things. He did not want his school to be just something more than the ordinary in the sense that it was more free and happy than other schools, but it was his broader aim that it should represent further and wider ideals, embracing humanity itself. It was his idea that it should be a centre of culture, representing the best in both the East and West.

In his centre of culture, scholars and teachers from all parts of the world were to live together in a spirit of mutual understanding, sympathy and love and learn to appreciate the best in each other's culture and teach what they have to contribute to others. They lived in an atmosphere of ideas—of

living aspiration, and worked together in a common pursuit of knowledge. Tagore made an attempt on his institution to give educational training to the scholars not only in their own culture but also in the culture of others. Initiative and originality of mind were developed and courage of thought was inspired. The routine methods of teaching were not to be expected in his institution. The scholars were rather expected to carry on their own work, study with the help and facility given to them in the form of good library, ample leisure and ready help of teachers. Between the teachers and the pupils there was a close contact and intimacy of relationship, and it sought to establish a living relationship between them.

The ideal always before Tagore has been to realise, in and through education the essential unity of man. The way in which he sought to achieve that unity gave him an insight into the object of education and its problems. Naturally, his various educational experiments—the Bholpur School, the Rural Farm, the Institute of Rural Reconstruction and Siksha-Satra and his Viswa-Bharati, which represent all, crystallize his various aims and objects of education which in turn had a wonderful philosophy of education, on which foundation, the superstructures have been built. In fact, the various methods adopted by Tagore in the different branches of Viswa-Bharati only show the different ways in which he sought to achieve the cherished aim and make his educational philosophy a practical success.

In the West, Tagore is recognized not only as a poet and as one of the foremost thinkers, but also as one of the most outstanding educators of the present age. This is not because of any of the books on the philosophy of education that he has written—although one can find some of the

most modern theories of education in some of his writings, but because of the school which he has founded, and because of the principles of education which he has tried to work out and which are recognised by all the leading educators.

Tagore's philosophy and his principles of education have not been the outcome of any special training he had received at a training college or a University, as such, for he had attended neither. His philosophy was the philosophy of an artist and of a poetic genius. Being an artist and also a poet, and therefore of a highly sensitive nature, he realised and appreciated this sensitiveness in others, especially in children. Following these principles, the small Vidyalaya which was started in 1900-01 as a small boarding school for boys, and which centred round a couple of small huts, grew into a large institution that not only took in boys and girls, but also extended its activities in other directions as well—the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, The Rural Farm, Siksha Satra, and the Viswa-Bharati with its various buildings and departments has made the programme of education complete for the harmonious development of the cultural, economic and social life of the people.

The role of music and art in educating the minds of children has been strongly recognized by Tagore. It is chiefly through music that both the students and teachers at Shantiniketan have understood the poetry of Tagore just as they have also understood his ideas by acting his plays. It is according to Tagore's own philosophy of education, that pupils learn best through the subconscious mind—while acting in a play the actors subconsciously assimilate the ideas underlying the plot ; similarly, most of the students have learned Tagore's poetry by heart through music.

In fact, Shantiniketan, looks much like an ancient hermitage, and yet it is thoroughly modern. Here one finds life and education for life—all the modern educational principles are being practised here—learning by doing, social activities, and an all-round development of the whole man, not omitting the idea of service to one's fellowmen. Shantiniketan is one large family, the members are from different religions, castes and creeds from different parts of India, from Europe and the Far East and yet they seem to fit in with the atmosphere, all working for a common cause and in perfect harmony with one another.

SECTION III

Tagore's Aim of Education

There are many educationists who have propounded different aims of education—education in terms of efficiency, acquisition of knowledge, preparation for life, etc. But there are very few like Tagore whose views on education are comprehensive and many-sided. From his various experiments in education, conducted in his own institutions, with the small beginnings to that of the highest, his object and aim of education becomes clear.

Being a great visionary and a man of spiritual wisdom, his object of education is the emancipation of man from all kinds of bondages. He aims at a perfection, not only that of body or mind only but also that of the soul. In order to achieve that aim in his endeavours he makes education as broadbased as possible. That becomes evident when he says, "But for us to maintain self respect which we owe to ourselves and to our Creator, we must make the purpose of our education nothing short of the highest purpose of man, the fullest growth and freedom of soul."¹

At the same time he condemns the modern view of education which aims at only economic self-sufficiency, thereby making a slave to greed and money, ignoring the nobler aspects of life.

He expresses that when he says, "It is pitiable to scramble for small pittances of fortune. Only

1. Page 5, *My School*, Pamphlet No. 1—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati.

let us have access to the life that gives beyond death and rises above all circumstances, let us find our God, let us live for that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondages of the dust and gives us the wealth, not of things, but of inner light, not of power, but of inner love.”²

Tagore's object of education was to bring about the perfection of man by dispelling the darkness of ignorance and the ushering in of the light of knowledge. For Tagore knowledge does not mean mere pedantry but true wisdom which will be expressed in action through sympathy and love. In this connection Tagore observes : “We have to keep in mind the fact that love and action are the only mediums through which perfect knowledge can be obtained, for the object of knowledge is not pedantry but wisdom.”³

According to Tagore, true freedom is not possible unless it is expressed in action. By developing a breadth of outlook through education an individual can express himself fully—in many ways, through which perfect freedom of body, mind and soul is possible. To put it in his own words : “Apathy and ignorance are the worst forms of bondage for man ; they are the invisible walls of confinement that we carry round us when we are in their grip”.

“In educational organizations our reasoning faculties have to be nourished in order to allow our mind its freedom in the world of truth, our imagination for the world which belongs to art and our sympathy for the world of relationship. The art is even more important than learning the geography

2. Page 5, *My School*, Pamphlet No. 1—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati.

3. Page 4, *Poet's School*—Rabindranath Tagore, Bulletin No. 9, Viswa-Bharati, July, 1946.

of foreign lands.”⁴ By creating an atmosphere of ideas in his institution, by making provision for the growth of mind through many creative activities, by making teaching life-inspired and life-centred and by making education a joyous adventure of intellectual exploration and discoveries the freedom aimed at is to be achieved according to Tagore.

Another object of education, according to Tagore, was the highest one, that of giving man the unity of truth. That unity of truth can be obtained only when there is no separation of relationship between the intellect, the physical and spiritual aspects of education but a harmony prevails. Tagore rightly observes that the highest education is that which does not merely give one information but makes one's life in harmony with all existence. While aiming at such a harmony, he deplores people devoting their whole attention to giving children information, not knowing that by this emphasis they are accentuating a break between the intellectual, physical and the spiritual life.

Tagore attached far more significance to moral values in education than for mere results of science which produced a system and physical power. He aptly observes: “That we should borrow science from the West is right, we have a great thing to accept from the people of the West, —their treasure of the intellect which is immense and whose superiority we must acknowledge. But it would be a great degradation on our part if we forget our own moral wealth of wisdom, which is of far greater value than a system that produces endless materials and a physical power that is always on the war-path.”⁵ Having witnessed the disasters that the first World War produced

4. Page 13,—*Ibid.*

5. Page 67, *Talks in China*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa—Bharati Bookshop.

he began to distrust the evil purpose for which man's intellect has been utilised and therefore, he observes : "I came to the conclusion that what was needed was to develop and give form to some ideal of education so that we might bring up our children in the atmosphere of a higher life."⁶

Rabindranath keenly felt the need for idealism in education which was greatly lacking in the Western education that was given to the Indians. In trying to restore the factor that was seriously lacking, he wanted to bring about a harmony between the West and East. While so doing, he did not distrust completely any culture, simply because of its foreign character.

In his 'Creative Unity,' he observes : "Then again, let us admit that modern science is Europe's great gift to humanity for all times to come. We in India, must claim it from our hands and gratefully accept it in order to be saved from the curse of futility by lagging behind. We shall fail to reap the harvest of the present age if we delay."⁷

In fact what he objects to is the artificial arrangement by which foreign education tends to occupy all the space of our national mind, and thus kills, or hampers, the great opportunity for the creation of a new thought power by a new combination of truths. It is this which makes me urge that all the elements in our culture have to be strengthened, not to resist the Western culture, but truly to accept and assimilate it ; to use it for our sustenance, not as our burden ; to get mastery over this culture, and not to live on its outskirts as the hewers of texts and drawers of book-learning."⁸

6. Page 67—*Ibid.*

7. Page 193—*Creative Unity*—Rabindranath Tagore, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1950.

8. Pages 193-194—*Ibid.*

Thus Tagore does not want education to be merely informative but desires that it should be creative also. "The great use of education is not merely to collect facts, but to know man and to make oneself known to man."⁹

The aims and objects of education which are of a varied nature have been incorporated by Tagore at his Viswa-Bharati in a crystallised form. They find a place in the prospectus of Viswa-Bharati under 'Aims and Objects' which are reproduced here below :

"Aims and Objects

To study the mind of man in its realization of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.

To bring into more intimate relation with one another through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity.

To approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia.

To seek to realize in a common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and the West, and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the establishment of free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres.

And with such ideals in view to provide at Santiniketan—a centre of culture where research and study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilizations may be pursued

along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity in externals which is necessary for the spiritual realization, in amity, good fellowship and co-operation between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western countries, free from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste."¹⁰

When the aims and objects of Viswa-Bharati, referred to above, are subjected to a critical analysis, it may be found that Rabindranath Tagore, being a visionary and a true seeker of Truth, has covered the entire gamut of human thought and has been deliberately comprehensive in adumbrating his aims and objects of education.

10. Page 1, *Viswa-Bharati Prospectus*.

SECTION IV

Inspiring Factors for Founding the School of Santiniketan

It is easy to see why Tagore should decide to found a school and why he should choose Santiniketan as the right place for it. Tagore longed for freedom in the greater world. He himself explains, that "The founding of my school had its origin in the memory of that longing for freedom which seems to go back beyond the sky-line of my birth."¹ The nature of freedom that he sought was one of perfect freedom which could be realised in this world, in the perfect harmony of relationship—a truth that could be reached not through feeling it by the senses, or knowing it by reason, but through the union of perfect sympathy and love.

The unpleasant experiences of his school days impressed on him that his school should be different from the schools wherein he was instructed as a boy. The school-life of his boy-hood days was so distasteful to him that he played truant from it as often as possible and also resorted to all sorts of subterfuges, in order to escape from it. He beautifully explains : "Thus my experience had impressed on me the suffering, owing to the repression of personality, the dissociation of life from the subjects of their study, which boys endure from the school system in vogue in our country. Therefore, when the call came, I went from my home on the Ganges to

1. Page 5, *A Poet's School. Bulletin No. 9*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati, July, 1946.

Santiniketan, in order to found there a school in the midst of the Ashram itself.”²

In another context, he plainly admits that the main reason for his founding the school at Bholpur, lay in the repressed freedom, which thwarted self-realisation. He explains that as follows: “The phantom of my long-ago boyhood did come to haunt the ruined opportunities of its early beginnings; it sought to live in lives of other boys, to build up its missing paradise, as only children can do with ingredients which may not have any orthodox material, prescribed measure or standard values.”³

There were many inspiring factors which induced Tagore to start a school. While it owes its origin primarily to the memory of his school days. It is also due to his deep love of children. He had several children of his own and he wanted them to be as happy as possible and train them to use to the full their gifts of mind and body and spirit. ‘The vision of life in its highest reaches and also in its most universal manifestation that Rabindranath gained as a poet gave him unfailing insight into matters educational. He could detect with an unerring eye whatever was foreign to or out of harmony with the central process we call education. This was apparent when even as a boy he took a definite aversion to the current system of education and boldly refused to have anything to do with it.’⁴

Tagore has been interested in education for

2. Page 2, *The Viswa-Bharati*—Rabindranath and Andrews, G.A. Natesan & Co., Madras, 1953.

3. Page 1, *A Poet's School*—Rabindranath Tagore, Bulletin No. 9, *Viswa-Bharati*, July 1946.

4 Page 1, *Siksha-Satra*—An Experiment in Rural Education at Santiniketan, Bulletin No. 21, *Vishwa-Bharati*, Jan. 1943.

years and the vivid memories of his own boyhood days guided him in knowing what was wrong, what was right, what he should do and what he should not do. He had suffered imprisonment both in the home and in the dull dreary atmosphere of the classroom. Therefore, he aimed at freedom in education for his children. Further he wanted education to be natural, life-inspired and life-centred. The children of his school, he thought, should learn by exploring, experimenting, by activity, by music and drama and by making a noise.

What Tagore reacted against was the inelastic system of education, in the grip of which the human beings were completely squeezed and wherein living souls were forced into a permanent passivity—making them incapable of moulding circumstance to their own intrinsic design and of mastering their own destiny. Therefore, Tagore was possessed by a wonderful vision of an educational institution of overflowing life, full of the spirit and of freedom of inquiry and experiment.

Another inspiring factor in Tagore's for founding the school on the Tapovana ideal and choosing the place Santiniketan as the ideal site for the school was due to his peculiar fascination and admiration for the Ashramas of the Upanishadic period. Having been saturated with Upanishadic ideas and having been brought up in a city-built education, the naturalness and the need for developing sensitiveness for colour, for music for movement of life and other aspects took possession of him and they craved self-expression in him. Therefore, the ancient Indian ideal of education appealed greatly to Tagore—the Gurukula System. In olden days the Gurukula System of education was characterised by its unique simplicity, naturalness and richness of spirit, which were the result of close and intimate inter-personal contacts between

the teacher and the pupil. In such an atmosphere, there was true learning through true living. Life was lived in its full in the natural school-rooms of the forest-ashramas, underneath the shady-trees, and in the thatched mud cottages. Outwardly, there was a sign of poverty but inwardly, some of the highest flights of human thought which mankind has ever attained, were reached—the ideal of the Brahmachari Ashram, the ideal of the forest hermitage were not dead ideals of the past. It was in fact the secret of India's true national greatness in education in the past.

The Gurukula ideal of plain living and high thinking appealed to Tagore very much and he intensely desired to revive those ideals in their true and essential forms at Santiniketan. The West had already brought in its place a vulgar idea—of bigness, the ideal of power which is false religion and which produced a repulsion in Tagore. Naturally Rabindranath's mind was drawn towards the forest colony of ancient India, to which the youth in his student days went to stay with the Guru in his hermitage, to live the simple, austere life of the learner and disciple, and to live close to the very heart of Mother-Nature, away from the excitement of cities. It was this ideal which appealed deeply to Tagore and he says, "We want a place where the beauty of nature and the noblest pursuits of man are in a pleasant harmony."⁵

The Tapovana ideal did not mean for Tagore a philosophy of renunciation of a negative character, but of a realisation, fully comprehensive in its scope. It did not mean a mere colony of people, with a primitive culture and mind, but a centre of culture, a place for seekers of truth, for the sake

5. Page. 134, *Rabindranath Tagore—A Biographical sketch* by Ernest Rhys, New York, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1915.

of which they lived in an atmosphere of purity, but not of puritanism ; of the simple life, but not the life of self-mortification. He was so inspired by the ancient Indian ideal of education that he wanted it to be re-lived and also make it real, under modern conditions of life. To put it in his words, "It seems that the sub conscious remembrance of some primeval dwelling-place wherein our ancestors' minds were figured and voiced the mysteries of the inarticulate rocks, the rushing water and the dark whispers of the forest, was constantly stirring my blood with its call. Some shadow-haunted living reminiscence in me seemed to ache for the prenatal or cradle and play-ground it once shared with the primal life in the illimitable magic of land, water and air."⁶

SECTION V

Tagore's Educational Experiments

A. The Bholpur School

When Rabindranath was about forty years old in the years 1900-01, he founded his new school at Santiniketan. The school owes its origin not to any new theory of education but to the memory of his school days. Fortunately for him, the place which he was to select was already there where his father used to go and stay longer or shorter periods to share in the quiet life of thought and prayer. His father had already built an ashram and a mandir, or a hall of worship at Santiniketan, which place, Tagore chose as an ideal site for establishing his school—a school where Tagore would teach his boys the lessons of freedom and joy in work and life which he learned from his own father. The same place was dedicated by the poet's father to the use of those who sought peace and seclusion for their self-realisation.

While starting his school, Rabindranath had in his mind, the *tapovana*, the forest hermitages of ancient India where the teachers and the pupils would be seekers of truth, and would live the life of truth far away from the din and excitement of crowds amidst the natural beauties of the forest.

In such an atmosphere, the scholars and students were expected to live in a very simple manner, to learn to think truth as more important than riches, to love Nature and to respect all life. Rabindranath firmly believed that India's work was to teach the world this love of outward simplicity and inward truth. In fact, Tagore wanted Santiniketan to be rather the first new forest school of India, but

at the same time, he did not want it to be just a replica of the old type. He hoped, that it would have the same spirit of the ancient forest school but at the same time, a different outward form suiting the times.

The place which Tagore selected was "...a vast open country, bare up to the line of the horizon except for sparsely growing stunted date palms and prickly shrubs, struggling with ant-hills."¹ His primary object was not teaching but living a life in God. The traditions of the forest colonies of great teachers fascinated Tagore and he wanted to recapture its spirit in his institution. Tagore's admiration for the ashram was due to the fact that "they consisted of homes where, with their families lived men whose object was to see the world in God and to realise their own life in them. Though they lived outside society, yet they were to society what the sun is to the planets, the centre from which it received its life and light. And here boys grew up in an intimate vision of eternal life before they were thought fit to enter the state of the house-holder."²

The school of Tagore arose in a natural way from little beginnings. It was while residing there in the year 1901, the idea of reviving the ashram occurred to the mind of Tagore and it was an experiment in this direction that in the year 1901, he began to keep a little school with only four or five pupils in all, of whom one was his own son and most of them happened to be problem children who were supposed to be incorrigible. But slowly the school grew and in a few years there were a hundred and fifty boys living together there, all in residence. Now there are many girls also, with a separate hostel,

1. Page 5, *My School*—Pamphlet No. 1, Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati.

2. Page 4, *Ibid.*

but they share all the classes and other activities with the boys.

Santiniketan is a garden school. Here the classes are held in the open air—the whole life of the school goes on out-of-doors. The various classes meet under different trees in the grounds and each boy, where there is writing to be done, will take his own mat, ink-pot, paper and pen. Since it was a poet's school, it was full of music and poetry. In fact, Rabindranath once called the school itself a poem—a poem that was written on life, and not on paper. The days in the school began and ended with music. Rabindranath himself composed most of the songs and hymns and he taught the boys to sing them every morning before sunrise. Every morning a group of student singers would go round the ashrama and wake up the boys before sunrise by singing some of the songs of Tagore which signified joy and praise to God for morning and evening, for the flowers of spring and the harvest of autumn, for the heat and dew, for the days of storm and rain and for the quiet moonlight nights. As observed by Marjorie Sykes, a close associate of Rabindranath, "The children loved these songs and by learning them they learned also something of the poet's joy in this lovely world and his thoughts of God who creates it and dwells in it."³

Since Tagore was a lover of children, he wanted them to be as happy as possible and train them to use to the full their gifts of mind, body and spirit. He never prescribed anything to the children but allowed them complete freedom. He trusted the children with full confidence and therefore they always responded to his trust. The so-called problem children did not create problems of indiscipline. Tagore created in Santiniketan an atmosphere of

freedom and trust and in such an atmosphere where the children had many opportunities for full self-expression, no trouble arose. Further, the boys were encouraged to manage their own affairs and to elect their own judge, if punishment was to be given. Therefore, in the matter of maintaining discipline, Tagore has set up, for the teachers of the future, a very good example. Tagore has never himself punished the boys.

The activities of the school at Santiniketan can best be described only by a day's visit to the school. However, a programme of daily activities at Santiniketan is furnished here below :—

Programme of daily activities at Santiniketan

4.30 a.m.—Choir of boys go round rousing the sleepers up into the beauty of the calm of early dawn. After waking up, boys clean the rooms—from the beginning they are taught not to despise any manual work. Immediately afterwards they have physical jerks and after some rest they enjoy their bath. Just before sunrise, the boys will devote at least 10 minutes for meditation under the trees and it is followed up by breakfast when there used to be a brief recitation from the Upanishads.

12 Noon —Dinner.

Since the working hours are from 8 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. practically all the hard work of the day is got through in the morning hours. The evenings are usually devoted to light work only. The boys used to spend their time in preparing lessons, group discussions, games

and other creative activities. After games they enjoy their bath and just before sun-set they devote a few minutes for meditation. Then, they have their last meal preceded by chanting. The nights are devoted to activities like story-telling, acting dramatic scenes, singing and so on.

9.30 p.m.—Go to bed.

There used to be a choir of boys singing before they go to bed.

Thus, in Santiniketan, the students begin their days with songs and end them with songs.

The school of Santiniketan has its own peculiar features, which are also the modern features in education. The school was something outrageously new, passing through many changes and often grave crises. Tagore himself explains the difficulties he had to face through : “Having the evil reputation of a poet, I could with great difficulty win the trust of my countrymen and avoid the suspicion of the bureaucracy. That at last I have been able to accomplish it in some measure is owing to my never expecting it, going on in my own way, without waiting for outside sympathy, help or advice. My resources were extremely small, with the burden of a heavy debt upon them. But this poverty itself gave me the full strength of freedom, making me rely upon truth, rather than upon materials.”⁴

The system that Tagore built up in his school was not a rigid one, since he himself despised the mere idea of size or organization as such. He was not afraid of the small beginning it had ; he cared

4. Page 6, *My School*—Pamphlet No. 1, Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati.

more for the rich ideas and the true spirit with which it worked than for anything else. Even when he started his school, he openly declared his underlying motive as such : "For the idea is not like a fixed foundation upon which a building is erected. It is more like a seed which cannot be separated and pointed out directly it begins to grow into a plant."⁵

The growth of this school was the growth of his life and not the mere carrying out of his doctrines. The ideals of Santiniketan changed with his maturity, like a ripening fruit, that not only grows in its size and deepens in its colour, but undergoes change in the very quality of its inner pulp. The idea with which Tagore started the school was a very noble one and he worked very hard, with a missionary zeal, making a huge sacrifice of his all—money, energy and time. He was himself little convinced with the smallness of its results, but at the same time he was not disheartened. He just went on building system after system, and pulling them down which merely occupied his time and at the same time he had a feeling that at heart his work remained vacant. Later, he realized his mistake of having deluded himself into thinking that his purpose was the school and gradually his heart found its true centre, not in the work, or in his wish, but in truth. The storm and stress that Tagore had in his mind at the earlier stages, all soon began to give way, after his realisation that he should no longer be excited about the results of his endeavours.

'The secret of success becomes a great revelation when he gives out that "Thus when I turn back from the struggle to achieve results, from the ambi-

5. Page 18, *Lectures and Addresses*—Rabindranath Tagore ; Selected by Anthony K. Soares, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, 1950 (Indian edition).

tions of doing benefit to others and came to my own innermost need ; when I felt that living one's own life in truth is living the life of all the world, the unquiet atmosphere of the outward struggle cleared up and the power of spontaneous creation found its way through the centre of all things." ⁶ Whenever Tagore makes a self-analysis, he finds out that the true cause of failure to achieve the ideal or the desired goal lies mainly in the distrust of the spirit, in the habit of attributing the cause of failures to something outside oneself and the attempt to repair all looseness in the work by tightening the screws of organization. Later, he realized the inevitable obstacles in human nature and in outer circumstances. He knew, that living ideals could never be set into a clock work arrangement, giving accurate account of its every second and he was also aware that truth could be tested in discords and failures as well, which would come to lead men astray. Therefore, Tagore, for his part, began to believe more in the principle of life, in the soul of man rather than in mere methods. Since Tagore's upbringing was in an atmosphere of ideas, free from all conventions, he was fearless in his freedom of mind and it emboldened him to try experiments, undaunted by failures.

At Santiniketan, Tagore tried to create an atmosphere of ideas and in the teaching system of his school, he tried to carry out his theory of education which was based on his experience of children's mind. He had more faith in the sub conscious mind of children than in their conscious intelligence. He was also sure that what was needed was breadth of culture and no formal method of teaching. He wanted to develop and give form to some ideal of education so that children might be brought up in an atmosphere of a higher life. He emphasized the

6. Page 7, *My School*, Pamphlet No. 1, Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati.

need for Idealism in Education, so that an inner standard of perfection may be attained and self-emancipation obtained. He wanted to make learning a joyous adventure --learning by exploring and activity. In his school, there was no prescription, regarding the learning of lessons at set hours. The boys were given complete liberty to learn songs, not at set hours, but when they felt like it ; to read for hours together the treasures which they had treasured for themselves and to go exploring and to live like Robinson Crusoe. To put it in a nut-shell, the children of his school learnt by exploring and experimenting, by activity, by music, and drama and by making a noise. The naturalism of Rousseau finds its echo in his school. Tagore taught his children that nature was their best friend and not an enemy and therefore, they should learn by living and working with nature. Life was lived in its fulness, in communion with Nature, realising the unity of all mankind.

A knowledge of the way of life of the students of Santiniketan will reveal that the school of Tagore was a natural school. Tagore taught his children to celebrate with poetry and song the changes of the seasons and some of the important events of country life. There used to be a festival of spring, a festival of rains, a festival of autumn ; there was a special ceremony for tree-planting and a ceremony for ploughing. These important festivals were celebrated with great eclat. There were processions, music, dancing, poetry and wonderful pageants, full of colour and movement. Since Tagore had great faith in the educational value of acting, he encouraged the pupils to act plays. Being himself a playwright and dramatist, he wrote several plays and they were staged by the students. Sometimes he used to act them himself. This enthused others and naturally many of his pupils began to arrange their own rehearsals and act

many plays of Tagore. Gradually, it became a custom of the school of Tagore to act a play at the end of almost every day.

His ideal of education was not book-learning but learning through love and action, the true medium through which perfect knowledge could be obtained. His object of knowledge was not pedantry but wisdom. Therefore, he introduced in his school a number of cultural and creative activities, an active vigour of work, the joyous exercise of inventive and constructive energies that help to build up character. He believed in children making their own experiments and improvisation in order to give opportunities for exploring one's capacity through surprises of achievement.

Tagore was aware of the fact that children were more sensitive than grown-ups. He believed in the great value of natural education and very little in what is being taught. Tagore's craving for naturalism was all the more in his educational system since the non-civilised in him was sensitive and the city-built education took no account of the living facts such as the thirst for colour, for music and for movement of life. Therefore, Tagore introduced in his school multifarious activities that would appeal to the aesthetic sense of the pupils in a variety of ways.

Rabindranath did not want the path of knowledge to be very smooth and completely free from all obstacles. He recognises that "Life's fulfilment finds constant contradictions in its path, but these are necessary for the sake of its advance."⁷ Therefore, he was not for removing all obstacles in the way of children making their own experiments but

7. Page 7, *A Poet's School*—Rabindranath Tagore, Bulletin No. 9, Viswa-Bharati, July 1946.

rather thought that there was a love and joy of adventure and that a life of exploration and discoveries through surprises of achievement would mean a lesson, not in simple life, but in creative life. Naturally he was not for making smooth or ready-made the path of learning but felt that such an education would train not merely one's limbs to be in efficient readiness for all emergencies but to be in perfect symphony of response between life and world, to find the balance of harmony, which is wisdom.

The active, healthy life in Santiniketan, brought out all that was good in the boys and the accumulated rubbish of impurities was swept off. The daily life brought before them moral problems, in the concrete shape of difficulties and claimed solutions from them. The logic of facts showed to them the reality of moral principles in life. To the children of Santiniketan, studies were never a task, since they were permeated by a holiday spirit, taking shape in activities, in their kitchen, their vegetable garden, their wearing, their work of small repairs, etc. For these boys, vacation had practically no meaning since their regular class work has not been wrenched away and walled in from their normal vocation. Students' participation in various activities was voluntary and as such became a part of their daily current of life and it easily carried itself by its own outward flow.

Rabindranath did not believe in the rigorous methods of teaching which seemed dull and unappealing to him in his boyhood days. Even at the outset, when he started his school, he boldly declared that people were not to expect in his institution the ordinary routine methods of class teaching. In Santiniketan the scholars were expected to carry on their own work of study with the

help and facilities made available to them in the shape of a good library, ample leisure and the prospect of mutual co-operation among themselves. The boys were naturally expected to group themselves round the teacher of their own choice and accept any help that may be needed. In consequence, those students who would require an artificial method of teaching would find themselves out of place in Santiniketan.

In Santiniketan, there was true freedom in the method of teaching as well as in the way of learning things. Since there was no compulsion or force as to what they should learn naturally, there was an atmosphere of freedom in the institution. Naturalness was developed in the children through their daily, constant and intimate relationship with their human surroundings, through several media such as their associating themselves with the various festivals, dramatic performances, music, picture making, study of literatures and other activities, which were the true expressions of life. The students were given an opportunity to find their freedom in nature by being able to love it. It was helpful in developing in them a sensitiveness of soul in their relationship—not only with men and things but also with nature. Briefly speaking, Tagore believed in an education which took account of the organic wholeness of human individuality. For the healthy growth of such an individuality would be needed, a general stimulation of all its faculties, both bodily and mental. Tagore found from his experience in Santiniketan, that the minds of children actively engaged in vigorous constructive work, quickly developed energies which sought eager outlets in the pursuit of other kinds. Tagore tried his novel experiments with a few orphans and other helpless children who could not think of going to any school whatever.

Distinguishing features of the Bholpur School.

In founding the school of Santiniketan, Tagore did not mean to ignore the best in Western civilization and in Western culture. He merely intended that it should be based on the indigenous culture and tradition, retaining only what was best in them, while freely taking the best that the West has to give to the East.

Little did Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, the poet's father, realize what this school would develop into and how far its influence would extend. The poet's father endowed the place for the meditation of individual and his son endowed it with life itself.

Tagore's immediate objects in founding the Bholpur School was to have a place in which children would live a happy life and enjoy as much freedom as possible. He himself had rather an unhappy experience in his own school life, with the result that he ran away from it, never to return. It was this revolt against the evils of the then existing system—the school devoid of life and strictly disciplinary, so that no child was happy to go to school, which inspired him to free the children from the tyranny of the rod and from severe repression and strict discipline.

Children were happy to go to his school because, there, they had the utmost freedom and would not be forced into anything, which they did not wish to do. Under the natural and healthy environment of the Ashram, they found a natural outlet for their capacities and a greater chance of their development. In the school of Tagore, the gulf, which ordinarily exists in most schools, between the teachers and pupils is bridged by a true spirit of friendship and brotherliness. In the Bholpur School the personality of the child is greatly and duly respected and not suppressed, as ordinarily done in most schools.

At Santiniketan, under the environment of the Ashram, the pupils find the best opportunity for their physical, intellectual and spiritual development. Further, there, as members of their school community they learn their lesson of citizenship in a larger society and the activities of the school are so planned and organised that they are closely connected with those of society. Another peculiar feature of the school of Tagore is that there, the pupils have opportunities of drawing inspiration directly from their own folk-literature, and popular traditions and also receiving instruction through the medium of their own vernacular.

At the Bholpur School a deep religious spirit pervades the whole atmosphere. Since nature was always a living companion with Tagore, he saw spiritual significance in natural facts. No wonder then, that Tagore advocates life in nature and in the open as the best means of spiritual progress. According to him, the best means of deriving divine inspiration is to lose oneself in the contemplation of nature.

Tagore must have recognized the influence of environment on heredity as did the ancient teachers in choosing the forest shades or the banks of holy rivers as the sites for their ashrams. At Santiniketan, one is filled with a sense of divinity that surrounds it. Why ? Dull mechanical work degrades and brutalizes the individual, while a life of nature elevates and purifies the soul.

Rabindranath's affectionate care of the boys was a powerful spirit in the school ; it was its birth-spirit and it sustained the place and all those who lived and worked there. "Not many fathers speak of their sons with as great a longing and affection as the poet did of his boys."⁸ It was

8. Page 145, *Rabindranath Tagore—A Biographical Study*—Ernest Rhys, New York, Macmillan and Co., 1916.

Tagore himself, the great personality that effected the great results at Santiniketan. In every branch of art, he was their inspirer. Never was there a leader of youth, so many-sided in faculty, so apt to answer with encouragement all young attempts in art. The genius of Santiniketan was, no doubt, one of great originality, enthusiasm and freshness of spirit. Such was the influence of his great personality that it silently permeated the whole atmosphere of the school and inspired every member of the institution with the divinity and greatness of his character. Whenever Tagore happened to be in the school, he used to meet the boys twice a week regularly in the common hall and speak to them simply and with great affection in his own homely way on the great ideals of life. Naturally, the boys used to anxiously look forward to those meetings with the great teacher and founder. "In Santiniketan Rabindranath has sought to develop the idea of a House of Peace, a boys' Republic, a school-house without a task-master, to serve as a model to young India."⁹

There was no distinction between the teachers and pupils of Santiniketan. Life was lived in harmony with nature, realizing the unity of mankind in all spheres of life. All were considered to be learners together, seekers of truth, all endeavouring to follow the one rising path. Students lived in an atmosphere of freedom, love and trust with the teachers and learnt lessons of pure freedom, pure simplicity and pure renunciation. Ernest Rhys has rightly observed: "To know how education can be made musical both in the old way and the new, we should turn to the School of Peace at Santiniketan."¹⁰ At Santiniketan, the beauty of nature and the noblest pursuits of man were all in a pleasant harmony.

9. Page.107, *Ibid.*

10. Page 133. *Ibid.*

B. Viswa-Bharati

(Viswa-Bharti is Rabindranath Tagore's international university at Santiniketan. The term 'Viswa-Bharati' signifies a place of universal knowledge and world culture. Viswa-Bharati grew out of Santiniketan Ashram founded by the poet's father, Maharshi Devendranath in 1863.) The Ashram was meant originally to be a retreat where seekers after Truth might come and meditate in peace and seclusion. (In 1901 an experimental school was started at Santiniketan by Rabindranath) with the object of providing for an education that would not be divorced from nature, where the pupils could feel themselves to be members of a larger community and where they could learn and grow in an atmosphere of freedom, mutual trust and joy. Since (1921, Santiniketan has been the seat of Viswa-Bharti, an international university seeking to develop a basis on which the cultures of the East and the West may meet in common fellowship.)

As a result of his rich experience gathered not only by himself making experiments in education at the Bholpur school, but also (by his observations and knowledge gained during his world travel, he began to discover the true spirit and fundamental principle that should govern his international university.) It was during the poet's visit to Japan and the United States of America in 1916 that Tagore saw the signs of evil created by narrow ideas of nationalism, which had resulted ultimately in the great conflict between nations—the World War. After his return to India, Tagore conceived the idea of founding an institution where the scholars of the East and the West could meet and find a solution in bringing about a better understanding between the different peoples of the Orient and of the Occident,

especially through a study of their cultures, philosophies, art and music. // He very well realised that science had indeed brought the peoples of the world closer to one another physically, but it had failed in bringing the hearts and spirits of these people together, and therefore, (for bringing about a better understanding of the different peoples, he did not rely much on science but sought it through the spirit.)

.. To his institution, which he called Viswa-Bharati, where indeed the whole world finds its one single nest, he first invited scholars, teachers and friends from different parts of India representing its different cultures. Then many scholars from China and Tibet were also invited to come and join and invitations were sent to some of the most outstanding and eminent scholars of the West,) who were not only learned men in their respective fields of studies, but were also men of high ideals; and because they were men of high ideals they very gladly responded to his call. They came and stayed, not only as local guests but as honoured guests of the whole country. The scholars that came to Viswa-Bharati were more or less cultural ambassadors imbued, no doubt, with the best in Western culture humbly they came to offer it to the East. At the same time, they were also eager to take the best that they could find in the Eastern culture, which through life-long studies, they made their own. Thus, as the scholars, teachers and friends from the East and the West came to Santiniketan and helped Tagore in his work, its spirit widened and gradually, Tagore thought of opening its doors wide. (He wanted his institution to represent further and wider ideals embracing humanity itself.)

(The thought that led Tagore to the founding and establishment of Viswa-Bharati is best explained by Tagore himself as thus : "I had all along ex-

perienced the want of an institution in India which should be a true centre for all the different Eastern cultures, concentrating in one spot the varied ideals of art and civilization which have been contributed to the world by the various countries of Asia."¹) From his very infancy Rabindranath Tagore was fascinated by the descriptions in Indian literature of the ancient Indian University of Nalanda. Naturally, he felt very keenly that India should have a national university representing all that was best in Indian thought, art and civilization. His conception of Eastern culture embraced the civilization of India, that of the Far East and that of Islam.

During his visits abroad, Tagore was very much impressed with the concentration of the mind of Europe in every university and he found that the students who went to Europe from Asia, came into touch with the European mind from the very first and experienced no difficulty in discovering the mind of Europe. But such a concentration could not be had either in the Indian universities or in those of the Far East of his time. Therefore, he felt the need for the focussing of the mind of Asia in one central place for the presentation of the learning of the East to the West.

What the great lacunae in Indian education, according to Rabindranath Tagore, is, "we have lost in India, the creative mind; we have been satisfied with secondhand knowledge and inferior imitative work"² Therefore, he was particular in evolving a scheme of education which would enable the mind of India to find out truth, give expression to it in such a manner as only it can do. / His idea

1. Page 7. *The Viswa-Bharati*—Rabindranath and Andrews, G.A. Natesan and Co., 1923.

2. Pages 8 9. *The Viswa-Bharati*—Rabindranath and Andrews, G.A. Natesan and Co., 1923.

was to bring the scattered minds of India into co-ordinated activity, so that education can become not only receptive but creative as well. Further, the primary function of an university, according to Tagore, should be the constructive work of knowledge—bringing them together and giving them full scope for their work of intellectual exploration and creation He felt that India should be a true home for such a culture.

During his second visit to Europe and America in the year 1920-21, Tagore had an opportunity of coming closer to the heart of the West. It made him realize the need for bringing about a true meeting of the East and the West, beyond the boundaries of politics, race and creed. Thus, gradually the idea of founding a centre of Indian culture with which he started his school at Santiniketan widened and enlarged. "The fuller idea of Viswa-Bharati now included the thought of a complete meeting of East and West, in a common fellowship of learning and a common spiritual striving for the unity of the human race."³ In his centre of culture, the scholars from the East and the West were to live together in intimate contacts and learn and appreciate the good in each other in a spirit of mutual sympathy and generous co-operation which will be lasting. The teachers and students from all parts of the world were expected to live on terms of perfect equality, sharing a common life in an inspiring atmosphere of creative activity. Therefore, (the main object of Tagore in founding the Viswa-Bharati was to realize at one centre of Indian culture the spiritual unity of mankind—through Viswa-Bharati as a whole, to seek to establish a living relationship between East and West, to promote inter-racial amity and understanding, and fulfil the highest mission of the present age—the unification of mankind.)

Rabindranath's schemes of education at Viswa-Bharati was to be distinctly national, patriotic, absolutely Indian, of the very soil of Bengal, but yet it was to be infused with and aided by the highest, noblest and most intelligent thought and method of which the human spirit had hitherto made itself master. Even while founding his institution, he did not believe blindly in the organization as such but in such individuals all over the world think clearly, feel nobly and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth. In his attempt at bringing about a true integration of the East and the West, he refused to recognize any barrier between them, since he believed in the unity of all cultures. Tagore thought that both the East and the West were ever in search of each other as the right hand would need the help of the left. And therefore, the poet-educationist felt that, "The mystic consciousness of the infinite, which she (East) brought with her was greatly needed by the man of the West to give him his balance. On the other hand, the East must find her own balance in Science—the magnificent gift that the West can bring to her"⁴ In his educational experiment at Viswa-Bharati he tried to combine the wisdom of the East and the West and that shows his catholicity of outlook. He wanted Viswa-Bharati to be a connecting link, both intellectually and spiritually with the outside world, where the East and West could meet together on equal terms.

According to Tagore, the first step in the realization of such a unity was to create opportunities for revealing the different peoples to one another. A meeting-ground was to be found out, where there could be no question of conflicting interests. One such place will be the university, "where we can work together in a common pursuit of truth, share

4. Page 111, *Creative Unity*—Rabindranath Tagore, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, 1950 (Indian Edition).

together our common heritage, and realize that artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered secrets of the universe, philosophers solved the problem of existences, saints made the truth of the spiritual world organic in their own lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belonged but for all mankind.”⁵ The differences in man which are natural did not disturb his peace of mind, because he knew the fundamental principle of life, that is unity and therefore that the mind of man is one and it works through many differences which would be absolutely essential for the achievement of fundamental unity. There are differences and there are conflicts of interests and it will be idle to ignore them. But it was the aim of Tagore at Viswa-Bharati, to study such differences with a view to reconcile them. That life is harmony and rich in variety, that death alone is uniform were all well-known facts to Tagore. The achievement of fundamental unity was the primary aim of Tagore at Viswa-Bharati. And, therefore, he realized too well that the perfection of such a unity would lie not in dead uniformity, but, in harmony of relationship. (The aim of Viswa-Bharati was life-giving ; it was to achieve unity in diversity.

The function of Viswa-Bharati is best explained by Tagore himself as thus : “Being strongly impressed with the need and the responsibility, which every individual today must realize according to his power, I have formed the nucleus of an international university in India, as one of the best means of promoting mutual understanding between the East and West. This institution, according to the plan I have in mind, will invite students from the West to study the different systems of Indian philosophy, literature, art and music in their pro-

per environment, encouraging them to carry on research work in collaboration with the scholars already engaged in this task.”⁶ (Further, it was Tagore's ambition that the East should be completely revealed to the West in as much as the West has been revealed to the East and for the completion of that illumination there will be a need, “for the East to collect its own scattered lamps and offer them to the enlightenment of the world.”⁷)

While the primary object of Viswa-Bharati would be to reveal the Eastern mind to the world, he wanted its structure to be based on the synthesis of all the different cultures which Asia possessed. Since knowledge is universal, it has to be shared equally by all. Such a sharing would enable good appreciation of the distinct contribution of each country and at the same time, would not ignore the individuality of each and her specific power to exist. He did not want India to be merely receptive or imitative but wanted her to be conscious of her own rich individuality and the priceless treasures of wisdom that she has to offer to the enlightenment of the world. “When taking her stand on such a culture, she turns of the West, she will take, with a confident sense of mental freedom her own view of truth, from her own vantage ground and open a new vista of thought to the world. Otherwise, she will allow her priceless inheritance to crumble into dust and trying to replace it clumsily with feeble imitations of the West, make herself superfluous, cheap and ludicrous.”⁸ He wants every one not to forget that India had her own mind which was not something of a dead past but living, and that it thought, it felt, it expressed itself and it was receptive as well as productive.

6. Pages 172-173—*Ibid.*

7. Page 174—*Ibid.*

8. Pages 174-175—*Ibid.*

Tagore's early education was given through the vernacular medium only. Even before he studied English, he had the opportunity of learning and appreciating some of the best Bengali books. Therefore, he knew perfectly well from his own intimate and personal experience the immense advantages and absolute necessity of the vernacular medium for the growth of the mind. That was why he stressed the importance of the students' familiarity with their own languages and culture for the unimpeded growth of their intellectual life before they could assimilate the best culture of the West. Further, he also felt that the students should have the opportunity to form their own judgment through the medium of their own vernacular and their own cultures if they were to profit fully by learning all that the West had to teach. Therefore, at Viswa-Bharati all teaching was done through the vernacular only even though there was ample provision for the study of other languages, including study of English.

Viswa-Bharati was formally opened on December 22, 1921, twenty years after the founding of the Santiniketan school. (According to Tagore, Viswa-Bharati would have two main aspects, one would be for the East to know its own mind in the same way that the West has done, owing to its concentration of culture and the use of its vernaculars. Secondly Tagore sought at Viswa-Bharati to have a living relationship established between the Eastern and Western peoples.) "In accordance with the poet's thought, the work of Viswa-Bharati can be thought of as growing up in three concentric circles. The innermost circle is the circle of India."⁹ It represented the rich treasures of India contained in her literature, social traditions, art and music. Provision was made at Viswa-Bharati for the study

9. Page 8, *Rabindranath Tagore*—Marjorie Sykes, Longmans Green and Co., 1947.

of different Indian languages, different systems of music, dance and religion as well; for, Rabindranath clearly recognized that it was not enough to know one's own province, language or religion only. Therefore, Tagore welcomed students from all parts of India to Viswa-Bharati. The second circle is the circle of Asia.¹⁰ Viswa-Bharati maintained its links with other parts of Asia through the various departments of studies. Students from Persia, Ceylon, Burma and Malaya, Tibet, China and Japan were enrolled in one or other department of Viswa-Bharati and thus the students were helped to realise that no country could afford to be completely independent of other countries either in its thought of art or civilization. "The third circle is the world circle which includes along with Asia the civilizations of the West of Europe and America."¹¹ Rabindranath opened the doors of Viswa-Bharati to Western teachers and students who helped a good deal to make Viswa-Bharati a real world University.

(At Viswa-Bharati, Tagore tried to develop initiative and originality of mind in the students. Since he knew the defects of Western education, principally foreign and European, imitative and not constructive, he wanted to infuse a new spirit into it by introducing an inspiring atmosphere of creative activity, by making education as natural as possible allowing no divorce to take place between the scholarly few on the one hand and the hard struggle for existence among the masses on the other and by giving a prominent place to the aesthetic and artistic factors in education—art, drama, music, pageant, festival and song which are the vitalizing forces in education. In regard to the religious atmosphere of Viswa-Bharati, its essential note has been freedom. It was the law of Viswa-Bharati that

10. Page 82—*Ibid.*

11. Page 11.—*Ibid.*

there should be, in it, no barriers of caste or creed and no test of religious belief imposed on the students. Within the precincts of the Ashram, no image should be made the object of worship, no word of religious controversy spoken and no injury to be done to the life of bird or beast. Members of all communities were equally welcome and in the hostels and dining-halls students lived a corporate life and divisions of any kind, based on province, race, religion or caste were not allowed. While freedom, was thus a distinguishing feature of the religious life of Viswa-Bharati, this has not led to any vagueness or indifference as to the ultimate truth. Tagore made ample provision for the study of the different religious cultures of mankind and they received due recognition within the borders of Viswa-Bharati. While everyone was allowed to profess his own religion, he was also free to know and study the truth contained in other religions as well. Since Tagore believed that perfection lay not in uniformity but in harmony and since he loved truth more than sectarian religion, he could see some aspect of truth in each religion and he respected all religions with equal regard. Therefore, he would ask each member of Viswa-Bharati to be loyal to his own vision of truth, to respect the vision of others and to make a thorough and critical study of the best and highest truths contained both in his own and other faiths. In order to declare his faith in universal religion which characterised universal toleration, he arranged for an annual celebration of the festival of each of the world's greatest religious leaders, so that it could give them a better understanding of other religions.

Tagore expressed his deep regard for nature in a number of ways through his educational system at Viswa-Bharati where life was lived by all in vital harmony with all creation. "The poet's own fundamental thought, both of religion and education

alike, implies essentially a life lived in harmony with nature, not a life cut off from the heart of nature by artificial barriers of man's devising. It follows from this that in Viswa-Bharati, the education given is not merely a matter of books and class-rooms and black-boards and written examination-papers. It is an education received and imparted within the lap of nature herself, beneath the shade of over-hanging trees and under the open sky, at the festival of the full moon and through the music that ushers in the coming of the rains. (On every side and by every means the teaching given in the Ashram is kept in union with God's marvellous creation, in the midst of which we have our own place and function as well as other creatures. This implies a growth of intimate relationship with all that lives and moves around us. It means also a tenderness towards those creatures which live their life side by side with us in our surroundings. It is not too much to say that, apart from this vital harmony with all creation, the teaching given in Viswa-Bharati cannot fulfil its special object of bringing man himself into harmony with man."¹²)

Tagore's regard for nature which is deep, finds expression in the matter of sex education at Viswa-Bharati. He agrees with the modern educationists that there shall be no artificial educational barriers created between man and woman. In the International University of Rabindranath, both men and women share equally in the education given and both are equally represented in the constitution. Rabindranath's conception of future civilization is based on spiritual ideals of reciprocity between man and woman and not upon economic ideals of mere efficiency; upon world-wide social co-operation and not upon economic and political competition

12. Pages 40-41, *The Viswa-Bharti*—Rabindranath and Andrews, G. A. Natesan and Co., 1923.

or exploitation. And therefore, he would not ignore the equal claims of the superiority of a woman on any account. He wanted to remove the serious disabilities from which women have been suffering since ages, by providing equal opportunities for women along with men in matters educational. At the same time, he clearly recognized the basic fact behind that woman has her own functions for which she is specifically fitted by nature just as man develops naturally in other directions. Recognizing the other facts, Tagore, in his international University has made provision for certain common studies, in which both men and women would share alike, while women might take special interest in certain specific subjects such as child welfare, home-nursing, hygiene, domestic economy, etc

In order to prove his faith in human values and to give effect to his philosophy that men and women are equal, Tagore has tried to maintain intact the family life at Viswa-Bharati as far as possible. Separate family quarters have been provided for married teachers and they have been arranged on the family model so that there may be a house 'father' and a house 'mother' to care for the growing and various needs of the children in each group. While boys and girls take equal part in the common activities of different kinds of learning and creative life, the girls in the Ashram have their separate home with a mother in charge. Greater attention was being paid to this aspect of life, as Viswa-Bharati developed and the principle of the 'family group' was extended as far as it was natural and feasible to do so.

Viswa-Bharati is a residential university with students and teachers drawn from all over India and there is always a fair mingling of teachers, students and visitors from abroad. One of the many valuable privileges and opportunities availa-

able to students of Viswa Bharati is that a student by joining any one of the educational departments is allowed the benefit of attending classes or courses in any other department, provided the student shows a marked aptitude for such learning.

The Viswa-Bharati maintains the following academic Institutions or Bhavanas which are all co-educational and residential.

Patha-Bhavana (School Section)

Siksha-Bhavana (Higher Secondary)

Vidya-Bhavana (College of under-graduate and postgraduate studies and research)

Vinaya-Bhavana (College of teaching)

Kala-Bhavana (College of fine arts and crafts)

Sangit-Bhavana (College of music and dance)

Other studies

Viswa-Bharati also maintains, under the post-graduate college, three research departments :

1. Cheena Bhavana.
2. Indo-Tibetan Institute.
3. Hindi-Bhavana which organises teaching and research in Chinese, Tibet and Hindi respectively.

Besides the academic institutions or Bhavanas at Santiniketan, the university conducts the Department of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan, a self sufficient village. Although Sriniketan is mainly concerned with a comprehensive study of the problems of rural life in its socio-economic aspects and extension work in villages on the basis of such a study, a Faculty of Rural Education from the

elementary to the college level has been slowly developed there. Sriniketan maintains a Rural High school for children with a technical stream where craft training is sought to be co-ordinated with academic work. The rural school is called Siksha-Satra. It has both Basic and Senior Basic stages. At Sriniketan there is also a Cottage Industry Training section, where certificates are given on successful completion of the Artisan and Junior courses, and diplomas are awarded for the Diploma courses.

C. The Institution of Rural Reconstruction Sriniketan

Tagore's experiments in education have been many-sided. His experiment at Viswa-Bharati was an attempt to remove the poverty of the intellectual life of the nation and there he tried to bring about the perfection of mental life by a co-ordination of cultural resources. Similarly, he was equally concerned with the problem of material life of the nation. In solving the problem, he put much trust in the co-ordination of a nation's resources through the co-operation of the independent powers.

On February 6, 1922, only a few weeks after the formal opening of Viswa-Bharati, Tagore opened a new centre at Surul with the name of Sriniketan'. 'The word 'Sri' contains the idea of prosperity, of welfare resulting from activity and growing into healthy beauty. The name Sriniketan, therefore, reveals Rabindranath's hopes and ideals. He wished to make the village centre "a home of welfare and beauty."¹

When starting the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, the thoughts that were upper-most in the mind of Tagore were to arouse the feeling of self-confidence in the villagers and imbibe them with a spirit of self-help, train them in the principles of co-operation and lastly to urge them to rely on their collective strength for a solution of their numerous problems. That was why training formed an important part of the activities of Sriniketan in the sphere of rural reconstruction. A number of training courses and camps have been regularly organized in the past at

1. Page 88, *Rabindranath Tagore*, Marjorie Sykes, Longmans Green & Co., 1947.

Sriniketan. Even while starting the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, Tagore has envisaged the need for many hundreds of village level workers and social workers for whom training is now being given in a number of training centres started by the Government of India under the National Extension Services and Community Development Schemes of the First and Second Five Year Plans.

Rabindranath started the Institute with a few boys and like the other departments of Viswa-Bharati, Sriniketan had its small beginning. The basis of his Institute was laid on co-operation. Tagore believed that his educational institution should not only instruct, but live ; not only think, but also produce. He wanted his centre of culture, not only to be a centre of intellectual life of India, but also the centre of her economic life. In his scheme of things, true education is to realize, at every step, how the training and knowledge gained has organic connection with one's surroundings. Therefore, it was his ambition, that education to be true, should be in full touch with complete life—economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual.

Aims and Objectives of the Institute of Rural Reconstruction.

(1) "To win the friendship and affection of the villagers by taking a real interest in all that concerns their life and welfare, and by making a lively effort to assist them in solving their most pressing problems ;

(2) "To take the problems of the village and the field to the classroom for study and discussion and to the experimental farm for solution ;

“(3) To carry the knowledge and experience gained in the class-room and the experimental farm to the villagers in the endeavour to improve their sanitation and health, to develop their resources and credit, to help them to sell their produce and buy their requirements to the best advantage : to teach them better methods of growing crops and vegetables and of keeping livestock ; to encourage them to learn and practise arts and crafts, and to bring home to them the benefits of associated life, mutual aid and common endeavour ;

“(4) To work out practically an all-round system of elementary education in the villages based on the Boy Scout ideal and training with the object of developing ideas of citizenship and public duty such as may appeal to the villagers and be within their means and capacity ;

“(5) To encourage in the staff and students of the department itself a spirit of sincere service and willing sacrifice in the interests of, and on terms of comradeship with their poorer, less educated and greatly harassed neighbours in the villages ;

“(6) To train the students to a due sense of their own intrinsic worth, physical and moral, and in particular to teach them to do with their own hands everything which a village house-holder or a cultivator does or should do for a living, if possible, more efficiently ;

“(7) To put the students in the way of acquiring practical experience in cultivation, dairying, animal husbandry, poultry-keeping, carpentry, smithing, weaving and tanning, practical sanitation work and in the art spirit of co-operation ;

“(8) To give the students elementary instruction in the sciences connected with their practical work, to train them to think and observe accurately, and

to express and record the knowledge acquired by them for their own benefit and for that of their fellowmen.”²

In his Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan, Tagore has tried successfully to give effect to his ideals of education and put them in practice. In his endeavour, he had the expert guidance and help of an Englishman, Mr. L. K. Elmhirst. Besides, he had the help of one of his own sons who was properly trained. He knew very well that interference with village life by ignorant persons would definitely do more harm than good. Therefore, Tagore refused to begin any rural reconstruction work without the help of men who had some kind of scientific training.

In addition to the above, there will always be a few vacancies for students who wish to come and earn their board and lodging and in return to learn self-support and be of service in the village. There will also be accommodation for a few research students in rural reconstruction work. Rural students will be able to attend lectures at Santiniketan on certain evenings in the week and a taste for art and literature was being maintained and developed by close contact with Santiniketan itself.

“At Sriniketan there is also a central boarding school for village boys, to which they come when they are eight or nine years old and stay till they are fifteen or sixteen. Here through the study of Bengal history and literature, the reading of biography and the discussion of current events, their outlook on life is widened. Science and mathematics have their place. The boys go on with their gardening

2. Pages 2-3, *Institute of Rural Reconstruction*, Prospectus of Apprenticeship and Training, Camp, Viswa Bharati, Bulletin No. 6.

and they begin to learn some craft, such as weaving or pottery. They do not usually take any public examination.”³

One peculiar feature of the school is home reading which has been included in the scheme of education by Tagore. He introduced home-reading since he was particular in widening the interests of young men and women in the events of the outside world even after they left school. Home reading pertains to subjects of general knowledge and most of the books are those written by Tagore himself since he has been deeply interested in the scheme. For those who successfully completed the course, certificates are awarded—junior, intermediate and advance. A little magazine was also published which contained important items of news of general interest. It was very helpful in adult education—in helping them to think, to lead a healthy life and to be happy.

Industrial training forms an important part of Sriniketan. Older boys were given training in the Silpa-Bhavana, the school of crafts, so that it might help them to earn their living in the future. Training in crafts was wider in its scopes since a number of courses were thrown open to them in the carpentry section, weaving section, book-binding section and the pottery section, etc. In all the above sections, the aim has been to keep in touch with the art school and artists at Santiniketan and as far as possible to make all the productions beautiful in colour and design. The main object of the department of Industries has been to revive the local industries and introduce such others as might be profitable to the village people.

Under the auspices of the department of Train-

3. Page 92, *Rabindranath Tagore*. Marjorie Sykes Longmans, Green & Co., 1917.

ing Camps, the Institute has been holding a series of training camps every year for the following purposes :

1. To train village boys as leaders of Brati-Balaks (scouts) in their own villages, about which reference has been already made.
2. To give an introductory training to young men from the villages and towns and to school teachers who may wish to take up some form of welfare or village reconstruction work.

A number of official and non-official organizations seem to have been co-operating heartily with such a kind of work and sending delegates to these training camps.

The general programme of these camps includes:

1. Camp-life and House Craft.
2. Handicrafts and Elementary Agriculture.
3. Scout organization, including a study of nature in its relation to life.
4. Co-operation, sanitation and hygiene and first-aid.
5. Recreation—drama, games, songs and story-telling.

The village-welfare department has been acting as the Extension Department for the Institute, carrying all its activities into the villages and co-ordinating the work of the different departments, with but one aim—that of Rural Reconstruction.

The test of the success of Tagore's experiment

in rural reconstruction is the test of real happiness that he was brought to the villages round Sriniketan. Rabindranath tried, by his experiments at Surul, to bring to the villages not only more money, but also greater interest in life and hence more happiness and enjoyment. The course of training that he offered at Sriniketan has enabled the people to become independent and self-reliant without which there could be no real freedom or happiness for the villagers. Rabindranath firmly believes that there could be no real independence for the nation except through the independence of spirit of all its villages. Therefore, he wants to make every village in India a Sriniketan, a home of welfare and beauty.

D. Siksha-Satra—An Experiment in Rural Education at Sriniketan

Siksha-Satra was the new school which Tagore founded in 1924. He began his experiment in rural education with a few boys who were too poor. One of the inspiring factors for starting the Siksha-Satra was to give a practical bias to education by giving fuller opportunities to the students to enter into intimate relationship with the natural and social environment. Secondly, Tagore wanted them to take upon themselves a greater measure of responsibility in meeting the day-to-day requirements of their individual and community life. Thirdly, he wanted the greatest emphasis to be laid on learning through creative occupations and at the same time, he wanted that knowledge of formal subjects should be co-related, as far as possible, to the basic activities.

Besides the poet, the two people who were most directly responsible for the starting of this experiment in rural education were Mr. L. K. Elmhirst, the first Director of the Institute and Mr. Santosh Chandra Majumdar. Both received their agricultural training in the United States, but neither of them had any professional training in teaching. In making the socio-educational experiment successful, Tagore had the enthusiastic and expert help and guidance of L. K. Elmhirst, the Englishman. He was a man who had spent much of his time on English village problems and who had also much experience in America. His special contribution lay in his desire to have village boys trained through modern science, in the various rural handicrafts and in agriculture. The boys would be trained in such a way that with their knowledge

and practical experience, they would naturally play a leading part in the reconstruction of their home villages and thus make for a renaissance of rural life in India.

What was the aim of Tagore in founding the Siksha-Satra ? "The aim of Tagore in founding the Siksha-Satra was to have a school that would equip boys for a full civic life. The boys must have their intellect developed, as well as their aesthetic imagination ; they must imbibe an *esprit-de-corps*, or team spirit, on which to build a harmonious social life in their home villages. The Siksha-Satra was founded as a model school run on model methods for building up of the ideal villages. Tagore's own words best explain his aims. "The primary object of an institution of this kind," he said, "Should be to educate one's limbs and mind not merely to be in readiness for all emergencies, but also to be in perfect tune in the symphony of response between life and the world."¹

In an article written in the Viswa-Bharati quarterly and later published in a bulletin under the title, Siksha-Satra, Mr. Elmhirst has ably laid down the principles underlying the experiment. A few extracts from the article will be sufficient to show that the work of the school has been based upon modern psychology and has been in keeping with the modern theories and principles of education.

Regarding the aim of the experiment Mr. Elmhirst makes the following statement :

"The aim, then, of the Siksha-Satra, is through experience in dealing with this overflowing abun-

1. Page 1, *Siksha-Satra*, An experiment in Rural Education at Sriniketan. Viswa-Bharati, Bulletin No. 21, January, 1949.

dance of child-life, its charm and simplicity to provide the utmost liberty for the joy of play that is work,—the work of exploration; and of work that is play,—the reaping of a succession of novel experiences; to give the child that freedom of growth which the young tree demands for its tender shoots, that field for self-expression in which all young life finds both training and happiness.”²

With these aims, as described above, the experiment was started with only half a dozen boys. With such aims in view the whole emphasis was laid upon education by experience, rather than upon education by mere teaching. Since the school was an experiment, only a limited number were admitted at the initial stages. They were either orphans or their parents were too destitute to send them to any school. No particular method was employed in the matter of selection of these boys. In fact, they came from different castes, homes and surroundings—a fact which proved to be of the greatest value from the psychological as well as from the sociological point of view. For a psychologist, these boys provided ample material for the study of “Nature and Nurture,” and ‘Hereditry and Environment.’

Siksha-Satra was a residential school and therefore a detailed study of the previous life and background of each boy was made. It enabled the teachers to discover the aptitudes of each individual and devise for his guidance a suitable technique. The training usually lasted from five to nine years as the case may be. Only boys of eight years of age were admitted, and preference was usually given to boys of poor homes from the neighbouring villages. While selecting students, care was taken to see that only those who would intend returning

2. Page 18, *Siksha-Satra*—L.K. Elmhirst, Bulletin No. 9, Viswa-Bharati, July, 1946.

to their village and work for the welfare of the community and would be prepared for self-sacrifice, were admitted.

Being a residential school, there was no distinction of caste or creed among the inmates. All the students and teachers, knit by feelings of community, as one social group. The students had plenty of opportunity for fully developing their talents and capacities under the guidance, as distinct from the pressure of the teachers. The nature of the course at Siksha-Satra was such that it ultimately aimed at leading the students to discover things for themselves, to encourage spontaneous curiosity in Nature and love of work and creation through work. In the long run, such a training was expected to equip them properly so that they might earn their living by some crafts, agricultural science, or business methods, and at the same time develop the body by physical culture. Sufficient care was taken to see that each one of the students maintained good health. In this regard, Tagore went far in advance of the times in introducing a system of medical inspection of all the students of Siksha-Satra and a follow-up work of those students. Such a scheme is being introduced in some modern schools, nowadays and it is worthy of consideration by all educationists. At Siksha-Satra, records of each boy's health and physical progress were kept and the defects noted were carefully treated.

There was corporate living and naturally a close intimacy of relationship between the teachers and pupils prevailed. The teachers' help and advice were always made available to the students and by original thinking and imaginative understanding, the teachers at Siksha-Satra tried to develop their latent powers of leadership.

With such materials, as above, the experiment was started. The first thing was gardening and

individual plots were laid out. Only an hour or so was given to the study of the three R's, and this did have a direct bearing on the work that they were doing in the garden. In the evenings, when the boys were engaged in cooking their food, the teacher would often read them the epics of Mahabharata. Those boys were being introduced to a wonderful world through such stories—a world of great and powerful personalities—and yet so human. The boys, invariably, used to choose their favourite heroes ; they had their likes and dislikes ; they even passed judgment on the various characters. By hearing such stories, they used to be greatly thrilled and their whole being stirred.

Distinguishing Features of Siksha-Satra Tagore's Experiment in Rural Education

Tagore, as everybody knows, had no faith in mere academic degrees as the final test of one's intellectual attainments. Being an educationist of creative genius, he did not believe in any formal, or set rules and methods of teaching. There was no time-table hung on a board, nor were any rules and regulations read to them. His methods were suggestive rather than prescriptive ; what was to be done was suggested to them, rarely what was not to be done. As regards work, they did what was considered most suitable at a particular time. Tagore's aim was to organize for the boys, a life of vigorous self-expression and creative enterprise. He condemned any other method in vogue which crippled the possibilities of self-expression. At Siksha-Satra, each boy was allowed to read any book he liked and progress at his own rate, with the guidance and help of the right teacher at the right time being always assured.

A close kinship may be found to exist between the Project method of Kilpatrick and the method

adopted by Rabindranath Tagore at Siksha-Satra, in the sense that the students at the institution of Tagore were allowed complete freedom in their studies. They were encouraged to read and understand the books of their own interest and to solve their difficulties by themselves. In such a system, the problem method is also unconsciously involved and the teachers are always there as under the project method, to help and guide the students.

All teaching was done in the vernacular through co-relation and to facilitate co-relation, as many opportunities as possible were given them for the kindling and development of the spirit of investigation, *i.e.*, the students learnt gardening through growing of vegetables ; regular marketing by the students themselves gave them knowledge of arithmetic ; their occasional rambles across the undulating country resulted in knowledge of geography ; and from their observation of several living beings, both within and outside the campus, sprang their knowledge of natural sciences. The regular visits to the neighbouring villages that were planned in advance gave them a keen insight into the living conditions of the people and an imaginative understanding of their numerous problems. A careful observation and a conscious study of their conditions aroused a keen interest in them and a desire to find out ways and means of solving their problems. A search for the solution of their problems would often lead them to a study of a number of allied subjects.

One day in the week was given over to an excursion which was usually in the form of a picnic. The night before these excursions, the boys themselves would make all the arrangements and collect all the materials required. During these excursions they would study the local geography as well as the history of the district. Visits used to be also arranged from time to time to the local post office,

the railway station and other places of local interest and the children introduced to the work of these institutions. Full of curiosity, they might put a number of questions and learn the history of the villages in the neighbourhood—the causes of their devastation and de-population. As they pass through the fields they would notice the different kinds of soils in various places. They would observe the irrigation tanks, most of which were in a silted condition and in very poor repair. While noticing all these things they would be told about the once flourishing condition of the villages and what led to their present condition. They would then offer suggestions of all kinds for the reconstruction of these fast-decaying villages. While on such excursions, the boys would collect all kinds of stones and fossils, and under the teacher's guidance they would learn a good deal about geology. Later they would make a beautiful herbarium and, assisted by their teacher write down a careful and detailed description of the leaves and other herbal specimens that they found. They would study the medicinal and economic values of the herbs and an elementary training used to be given them in the identification of some of the common herbs so that a knowledge of some of the herbs and their medicinal and economic values might be of great benefit to the rural people, who do not always have easy access to hospitals and dispensaries, especially in a country like India, which is full of medicinal herbs, where unfortunately most of the people cannot identify them.

During the holidays, the excursions used to be extended into more distant and remote parts of the district, and visits made to some places of historic interest—ruins of old forts, temples, and residences and factories (in ruins) of the East India Company. Those places would be studied from the historical, religious and economic points of view.

From the psychological point of view such excursions were very valuable, in that they helped to bring out the true nature of each boy. On such marches and picnics, a boy shows his spontaneous interest, his likes and dislikes, and reveals his true and real nature. In less than six months, the boys of Siksha-Satra would learn a good many lessons of self-help, personal hygiene and sanitation. But above all, they used to learn the dignity of labour. The value of such a training can be keenly realised in a country like India, where the division of labour, which led to the establishment of castes has made life very complex, with one person absolutely dependent on so many others for the necessities of life.

Whether the students were doing the work in their garden plots or in the weaving workshops, or looking after their household duties, the cultural side of their education was by no means neglected. They had great scope for creative self-expression. Study of literature and fine arts, music, dramatization, practise of painting and their exhibitions led them to a true appreciation of art and enabled them to express themselves freely. "The Siksha-Satra accords an important place to crafts of economic value and also to fine arts. Tagore considered aesthetic culture, as a medium of self-expression and as a source of inner happiness, to be of immense value in the education of children. The students are encouraged, after having had the opportunity of learning and appreciating the arts and music, to pass on their feeling for the aesthetic to their village home and thus add a richer quality to rural life."³

Rabindranath refused to have any faith in an

3 Page 2, Siksha Satra, An Experiment in Rural Education at SRINIKETAN, *Viswa-Bharati*, Bulletin No. 21, Jan. 1949.

education which took no account of the organic wholeness of human individuality. Therefore, his approach to education was humanistic and at Siksha-Satra, all teaching was life-inspired and life-centred. He capitalized the subjective experiences of the students and the methods adopted were largely based on the intelligent and imaginative observation of the boys' environment and background. Tagore was wonderfully able to maintain discipline in his institution, without the least trouble. Discipline was not enforced from without, either through coercion or force, but since the life of the boys was based essentially on natural co-operation and good will, the problem of indiscipline did not arise at all. And, if at all anybody misbehaved, the case was dealt with by the boys themselves in their court of justice, called the 'Vichara Sabha'. Tagore himself never punished the students, since he was not a believer in corporal punishment.

"This is how Rabindranath thought he would be able to introduce in the school an active vigour of work, the joyous exercise of inventive and constructive energies that help to build up character. This is how he sought to unite with the 'tapovana' ideal of education, the Western genius which knows how to clear the path towards a definite end of practical good."⁴ Tagore's conception of liberal education was considered to be rather revolutionary in his days, when he founded the school, and therefore, he had to fight against the many odds—the tradition of the educated community, the parents' high expectations, the wrong up-bringing of the teachers themselves and the over-whelming and false claim and prestige of the so-called universities. Yet, Tagore's experiment in Rural Education has

4. Page 11, *Siksha-Satra*, An Experiment in Rural Education at SRINIKETAN, *Viswa-Bharati*, Bulletin No. 21, Jan. 1949.

proved a great success since he had the heartening response of the villagers themselves who were unsophisticated and not job-minded and since the boys who were enrolled in his institution never thought of education merely as a means of passing examinations, just to find comfortable jobs in cities. "In view of the efforts that are being made today to re-orient the educational system to meet the needs of the people of free India, it is indeed curious to think that Rabindranath, nearly a quarter of a century back anticipated the most progressive educational thoughts and principles yet discovered and gave them a concrete shape in this small modest-looking institution, Siksha-Satra."⁵

5. Page 11, *Siksha-Satra*, An Experiment in Rural Education at SRINIKETAN, *Viswa-Bharati*, Bulletin No. 21, Jan. 1949.

SECTION VI

The Educational Ideas of Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath, the poet-educationist, is not a trained school-master as ordinarily every educationist is, but yet he is one of India's greatest geniuses who has made a bold attempt in revolutionising the educational ideas and thereby the system, to such an extent, that he has won international fame for his international university at Santiniketan. He himself acknowledges the fact of his not being a trained teacher, in the following words : " ...I had never had any technical training and had never passed any examinations. At first I was diffident about myself and thought that the founding of a school was a task which was beyond my power. Later on I had one or two with me who had received academic training and they helped me in my work."¹ When Tagore started his new school at Bholpur in his fortieth year, people were surprised at a poet's venture in that direction. Feeling a little bit embarrassed Tagore said, "This was never expected of me, who had spent the greater portion of my life in writing chiefly verses. Therefore, people naturally thought that as a school it might not be one of the best of its kind, but it was sure to be something outrageously new, being the product of daring inexperience."² In fact, not only his school, but also his ideas regarding education have rather proved to be outrageously new and

1. Page 2, *The Viswa-Bharati*—Rabindranath and Andrews, G. A. Natesan and Co., 1923.

2. Page 18 *Lectures and Addresses*—Rabindranath Tagore (Selected by Anthony X. Soares), Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, 1950.

his educational institution at Santiniketan has proved to be the best in the world.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to discuss some of the important educational ideas of Rabindranath Tagore.

The greatness of Tagore as an educationist, among other factors, is due to his perfect understanding of the child mind. Primarily, he looks at children as children and not as adults. Once purposefulness enters into education, it belongs to the adult mind. Therefore, he does not like the imposition of purpose into children's education at the early stage itself when their minds are free, and long for lessons of life, and not the machine-made lessons. When purpose or utility becomes prominent in education, it not only hurts the whole growth of the child's mind but forcibly spoils it soon. Tagore had a great insight into the child's mind and therefore he was aware of the incalculable wrong done by looking upon children, not from the point of view of living growing beings who need freedom for growth but who, from the point of view of adults—when looked upon as adults and not as children, are already grown up. Tagore asserts: "The child learns so easily because it has a natural gift. But adults, because they are tyrants ignore natural gifts and say that children must learn through the same process as themselves. We insist upon forced mental feeding and our lessons become a form of torture. This is one of man's most cruel, most wasteful mistakes."³

Tagore's understanding of the subconscious mind of children is so profound that he compares favourably with the psycho-analysts of the West who have struck a new path in the learning process.

3. Page 100, *Talks in China*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Book Shop, 1925.

ses. It becomes evident when he observes: "I believe, as I suggested before, that children have their subconscious mind more active than their conscious intelligence." A vast quantity of the most important of our lessons has been taught to us through this."⁴ He further reiterates, "Experiences of countless generations have been instilled into our nature by its agency, not only without causing any fatigue, but giving us joy. This subconscious faculty of knowledge is completely one with our life. It is not like a lantern that can be lighted and trimmed from outside, but it is like the light that the glow-worm possesses by the exercise of its life-process."⁵ Therefore, it is evident that Tagore sets great store by the rich treasures of knowledge and wisdom that the sub-conscious mind possesses than the conscious level understanding or conscious intelligence

Like the Gestalt psychologists, Tagore believes in wholeness in learning. He declares: "In our childhood we imbibe our lessons with the aid of our whole body and mind, with all the senses fully active and eager. When we are sent to the school, the doors of natural information are closed to us; our eyes see the letters, our ears see the abstract lessons, but our mind misses the perpetual stream of ideas which come from the heart of nature, because the teachers in their wisdom think that these bring distractions, that they have no great purpose behind them."⁶ He does not admit that children have any such distraction. He expresses his faith in wholeness of learning as such: "Our eyes naturally see an object as a whole not by breaking it up

4. Pages 7-8, *My School*, Pamphlet No. 1—Rabindranth Tagore, Viswa-Bharati.

5. Pages 8, *My School*, Pamphlet No. 1—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati.

6. Pages 97-98, *Talks in China*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Book Shop, 1925.

into parts but by bringing all the parts together into a unity with ourselves.”⁷ He is opposed to the partial method of learning. He declares his faith in the whole method of learning, with reference to teaching and learning of languages and points out that if the whole mind does not work from the beginning, its powers will remain undeveloped to the end. Tagore’s psychology is based on the principle of ‘wholeness’ that growth is the movement towards a yet fuller wholeness.

Tagore has broken the traditions in striking a new path in the method of teaching. His method of teaching is characterised by freedom. He does not believe in the routine methods of teaching. Even at the outset, when he opened his new school, he declared that the ordinary routine methods of teaching were not to be expected in his institution. To put it in his own words: “Those who still require an artificial method of feeding in their lessons, who need constant watching and goading from their teachers will find themselves out of place in *Viswa-Bharati*.”⁸ He did not like the mechanical method of dull teaching which was lifeless and uninspiring but wanted the boys to progress at their own rate without being goaded by others. Tagore vividly points out : “When I was young I gave up learning and ran away from my lessons. That saved me and I owe all that I possess to-day to that courageous step taken when I was young. I fled the classes which gave me instructions, but which did not inspire. One thing I have gained, a sensitivity to the touch of life and of nature who speak to me.”⁹

7. Page 59, *Reminiscences*, Rabindranath Tagore Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1954.

8. Page 20, *The Viswa-Bharati*, Rabindranath Tagore, & Andrews, G. A. Natesan & Co., 1923,

9. Page 78, *Talks In China*, Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Book Shop, 1925.

Rabindranath does not want the process of learning to be a burdensome one ; but he wants it to be one of a joyous adventure, full of thrills, wonders and surprises. He does not like a child being brought into the education factory wherein lessons are taught in a lifeless and colourless manner, practically dissociated from the context of the world, within bare white walls staring like eye-balls of the dead. It is Tagore's conception, that, "we are born with that god-given gift of taking delight in the world, but such delightful activity is fettered and imprisoned, stilled by a force called discipline which kills the sensitiveness of the child mind, the mind which is always on the alert, restless and eager to receive first-hand knowledge from mother nature. We sit inert like dead specimens of some museums, whilst lessons are pelted at us from on high, like hail-stones on flowers."¹⁰

Rabindranath aims at naturalness in teaching—little interference or imposition from outside. He wants the sensitivity of the children to be developed to a greater extent in which he finds great scope of learning to take place. Therefore, he disliked the school atmosphere wherein the doors of natural information were closed completely and the children's sense of wonder curbed. He is aware of the fact that their children's subconscious minds are more active than their surface level intelligence. He points out very aptly that, "children's minds are sensitive to the influences of the great world to which they have been born. Their subconscious mind is active, always imbibing some lesson, and with it realising the joy of knowing. This sensitive receptivity of their passive mind helps them, without their feeling any strain, to master language, that most complex and difficult instrument of

¹⁰. Page 97, *Talks In China*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Book-shop, 1925.

expression full of ideas that are undefinable and symbols that deal with abstractions. And through their natural gift of guessing they learn the meaning of words which we cannot explain."¹¹ Therefore, it is Tagore's contention that the subconscious minds of children contain more ideas and knowledge than what can be taught to them in an unnatural way on the surface level.

Rabindranath aims at freedom in teaching as well as in learning and therefore he does not like the lessons being forced upon the children. He explains it at length as follows : "Knowing something of the natural school which Nature herself supplies to all her creatures, I established my institution in a beautiful spot, far away from the town, where the children had the greatest freedom possible, in this above all, that I did not force upon them lessons for which their mind was unfitted."¹² He attached more importance to the atmosphere that should prevail in the school than to the method of teaching. That is why, he says, "I always had it in my mind to create an atmosphere. This I felt was more important than the teaching of the classroom."¹³

Tagore believed that children had their natural way of learning things which needed freedom and a sensitivity to life, to the touch of life and nature. A greater part of learning, according to Tagore, mostly abstract truths could be learnt easily and within a short time through such a natural process. "With them every new fact or event comes to a mind that is always open, with an abundant hospitality ; and, through this exuberant, indiscriminate acceptance they learn innumerable facts, within a

11. Page 96. — *Ibid*

12. Page 100, *Talks In China*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Bookshop, 1925,

13. Pages 100-101, *Ibid*.

very short time, amazing compared with our slowness. These are most important lessons of life, which are thus learnt, and what is still more wonderful is, that the greater part of them are abstract truths.”¹⁴

In learning, Tagore does not seem to attach much importance to the methods of teaching as such but to the way in which the children are dealt with in the class-room. He considers children to be living beings—more living than grown-ups. Therefore, the human element is more precious than anything else in the teaching-learning process. In teaching, the guiding spirit according to him, should be personal love. To put it in a nutshell, he has more faith in the principle of life, in the sanctity of the human soul than in the mere methods of teaching. Lifeless and soulless methods of class-room instructions are what he hates most.

Being himself a great poet, Tagore suggests the best method of teaching poetry which is worthy of consideration. Poetry, according to him should always be taught from the emotional stand point. It should not be treated like teaching grammar or looking into the dictionary. He rightly points out : “To employ an epic to teach language is like using a sword to shave with—sad for the sword, bad for the chin. A poem should be taught from the emotional stand point ; inveigling into service as grammar-cum-dictionary is not calculated to propitiate the divine Saraswati.”¹⁵

Rabindranath’s knowledge and understanding of the child mind is such that he knows what the

14. Page 99, *Talks In China*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati. Bookshop, 1925.

15. Page 57, *Reminiscences*—Rabindranath Tagore, Macmilan and Co., Ltd., London, 1954, (Indian Ed.).

child can learn and understand, and what he cannot. He pleads for simplicity in children's books and at the same time emphasises that they should be as attractive as possible. He had great admiration for the juvenile literature of Western countries which were beautifully bound and attractively presented with all kinds of simple and pictorial illustrations.

Similarly, he wants children's books in India to be full of such pictures in which he sees great scope of learning for children. He knew how unattractive the children's books were in his boyhood days and how difficult and abstract they were to understand. By way of a typical example, he points out : "Moreover, at the gate-way of every reading lesson stood sentinel an array of words, with separated syllables and forbidding accent marks like fixed bayonets, barring the way to the infant mind. I had repeatedly attacked their serried ranks in vain."¹⁶

Tagore understands the child's limitations and therefore approaches him with great sympathy. He knows for certain that the child's understanding of anything, can be only partial and not complete at the initial stages and that, only with maturity of thinking he could understand the whole truth. He is, therefore, not very much worried if the child is not able to understand everything. Remarking about the kind of juvenile literature of his days Tagore observes : "Juvenile literature in those days had not evolved a distinct type of its own—but that I am sure did me no harm. The watery stuff into which literary nectar is now diluted for being served up to the young takes full account of their childishness, but none of them as growing human beings."¹⁷

16. Page 44, *Reminiscences*—Rabindranath Tagore, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1954 (Indian Ed).

17. Page 111-112—*Ibid.*

Tagore's knowledge of child psychology is so profound that he very aptly points out : "Children's books should be such as can partly be understood by them and partly not." In our childhood, we read every available book from one end to the other ; and both what we understand and what we did not, went on working within us. That is how the world itself reacts on the child's consciousness. The child makes its own what it understands, while that which is beyond leads it on a step forward."¹⁸ Thus Tagore shows his remarkable understanding of the child's way of learning and his contribution to educational ideas in this direction is really great.

While making a strong plea for simplicity in juvenile literature, Tagore commends good magazines such as Chamber's or Cassell's or the Strand in England which supply the general reader with a simple but satisfying fare and are of the greatest use to the greatest number.

According to Tagore, completeness of understanding is not necessary at the early stage. He points out : "Who ever goes back to his early childhood will agree that his greatest gains were not in proportion to the completeness of his understanding."¹⁹ He used to say that he was not able to fully realize the meaning of the Gayatri in his boyhood days but yet it was full of deep spiritual significance, to him due to its suggestiveness which he explains as follows : "The fact of the matter is that what is going on in the inner recesses of consciousness is not always known to the dweller on the surface."²⁰

18. Page 112, *Ibid.*

19. Page 75—*Ibid.*

20. Page 76—*Ibid.*

Rabindranath sets great store by the value of suggestion in education. He appreciated very much the narrations of Kathakas which were full of musical Sanskrit words and abstruse remarks, not to be easily and fully understood by the hearers but were fully suggestive in its character. Tagore remarks : "The value of such suggestion is by no means to be despised even by those who measure education in terms of material gains and losses. These insist on trying to sum up the account and find out exactly how much of the lesson imparted can be rendered up. But children and those who are not over-educated, dwell in that primal paradise where men can come to know without fully comprehending each step. And only when that paradise is lost comes the evil day when everything needs must be understood."²¹ He further remarks : "The road which leads to knowledge, without going through the dreary process of understanding, that is the royal road. If that be barred, though the world's marketing may yet go on as usual, the open sea and the mountain top cease to be possible of access."²² Tagore also emphasises that reading should, as far as possible, be with reference to physical objects. He records his own experience and points out that since his reading had no reference whatsoever to physical objects, it became merely bookish. "We read our physical science without any reference to physical objects and so our knowledge of the subject was correspondingly bookish. In fact, the time spent on it had been thoroughly wasted ; much more so, to my mind, than if it had been wasted in doing nothing."²³

Tagore has learnt from his own experience the advantages of learning through one's own language

21. Page 76—*Ibid.*

22. Page 76—*Ibid.*

23. Page 56—*Ibid.*

and therefore, he wants all teaching, as far as possible, to be done through one's own language, which quickens the mind better than a foreign medium. Tagore observes : "It was because we were taught in our own language that our mind quickened, learning should as far as possible follow the process of eating. When the taste begins from the first bite the stomach is awakened to its function before it is loaded, so that its digestive juices get full play. Nothing like this happens, however, when the Bengali boy is taught in English."²⁴ Pointing out the difficulties of learning through a foreign medium, he remarks : "The first bite bids fair to wrench loose both rows of teeth—like a veritable earthquake in the mouth ! And by the time he discovers that the morsel is not of the genus stone, but a digestible bonbon, half his allotted span of life is over. While one is choking and spluttering over the spelling and grammar, the inside remains starved, and when at length the taste is felt, the appetite has vanished."²⁵

Rabindranath wants language, the medium of self-expression, to be moving, simple and pliable allowing modifications as the spirit of the age may demand. When a language does not allow necessary changes to be effected in its form but becomes fixed, then it brings upon it its own doom. According to him the form of a language can never remain fixed or rigid but must change. He convincingly argues that "The races of man have poetry in their heart and it is necessary for them to give, as far as possible, a perfect expression to their sentiments. For this, they must have a medium, moving and pliant which can freshly become their very own, age after age. All great languages have undergone and are still undergoing changes. Those languages which resist the spirit

24. Pages 50-59—*Ibid.*

25. Page 59—*Ibid.*

of change are doomed and will never produce great harvests of thought and literature. When forms become fixed, the spirit either weakly accepts its imprisonment within them or rebels. All revolutions consist of the fight of the within against invasion by the without."²⁶

It is Tagore's firm conviction that for one to understand the truths contained in another language, will always remain difficult however much the translations may be helpful in bettering the understanding process. That does not mean he underrates the value of translations. But what he emphasises is that the truth and ideas of a language can be truly appreciated only when it is read in its original form and not through another language. Therefore, he points out : "Languages are jealous. They do not give up their best treasures to those who try to deal with them through an intermediary belonging to an alien rival. We have to court them in person and dance attendance upon them."²⁷ In regard to the limitations of translations Tagore observes : "Man cannot reach the shrine if he does not make the pilgrimage. So, one must not hope to find anything true from my own language in translation."²⁸

Having been brought up in a very rich family Rabindranath knows the evils of luxurious living—a life lived not in fullness of self-expression but dissociated from the universe. From his own practical experience he learnt the lessons of simplicity in education and tried to bring up his own son along these lines. He took his son away from town surroundings into a village and allowed him

26. Page 4. *The Religion of An Artist*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Bookshop, 1953, .

27. Page 8.—*Ibid.*

28. Page 9.—*Ibid.*

the freedom of primeval nature- He had his own freedom to swim and row in the river even though known for its dangers. He did practical field-work as others without having the customary luxuries, which he considered to be harmful to young children. According to Tagore, luxuries are the burdens of other people's habits, the burdens of the vicarious pride and pleasure which parents enjoy through their children.

He always expressed his condemnation of a luxurious and expensive system of education. That did not mean he glorified poverty ; but simplicity was one of the signs of perfection in education, in his opinion. He observes very aptly : "I quite understand that food and the utensils to eat it out are both needful to man. But where there is a shortage of food, a parsimony in regard to utensils also becomes necessary. To make the paraphernalia of our education so expensive that education itself becomes difficult of attainment would be like squandering all one's money in buying money-bags."²⁹ The above is an illustration of Tagore's strong plea for simplicity in the system of education in India.

At the same time, Tagore does not want Indians to imitate the West in insisting on costly furniture and other paraphernalia being the primary requisites for a good education of the Indians. In India, during the Vedic period, the best kind of education has been obtained in the simple but natural surroundings of the forest retreats. Therefore, he refuses to believe that the highest education is that which is given only in the biggest buildings but holds the view that the highest education may be obtained even in the

29. Page 6, *The Centre of Indian Culture* a Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Bookshop, 1951.

simple surroundings. That is why Tagore remarks : "We in the East have had to arrive at our own solution of the problem of life. We have, as far as possible, made our food and clothing unburdensome ; and this our very climate has taught us to do. We require openings in the walls more than the walls themselves. Light and air have more to do with our wearing apparel than the weavers' loom. The sun makes for us the heat-producing factors which elsewhere are required from food stuffs. All these natural advantages have moulded our life to a particular shape which I cannot believe it will be profitable to ignore in the case of our education."³⁰

In his outspoken condemnation of the luxuries of modern civilization he deplores that : "Most things in the civilized world, such as eating and merry-making, education and culture, administration and litigation, occupy more than their legitimate space. Much of their burden is needless and in bearing it civilized man may be showing great strength, but little skill."³¹ Again, he adds : "when the simplicity of fullness awakens in the West, then work, enjoyment and education alike will find their true strength in becoming easy. When this will happen, I have no idea, but till then, we must, with bowed heads continue to listen to lectures telling us that the highest education is to be had only in the tallest edifices."³² Rabindranath has rightly characterised the temperament of an Indian to be simple because of the very nature of her soil. He observes : "To be simple without becoming poorer is the problem which each must solve according to his temperament."³³

30. Pages 6-7—*Ibid.*

31. Page 7—*Ibid.*

32. Pages 7-8 *Ibid.*

33. Page 8 *Ibid.*

The problem of maintenance of discipline was not anything serious for Tagore. In an atmosphere of freedom and trust, he believed that indiscipline would not arise. He laid more stress on self-discipline than enforcing discipline from outside. He realized that the instances of indiscipline in his educational experiments were mainly due to the mistake of judging boys by the standard of grown-ups and to forget that the boys were up to all kinds of mischief and for boys to be mischievous was but natural. He only sympathises with unforgiving school-masters and wants them to beware of wrong-doing and set a good standard to others. Tagore points out: "I now clearly see the mistake is to judge boys by the standard of grown-ups, to forget that a child is quick and mobile like running stream; and that in the case of such, any touch of imperfection need cause no great alarm for the speed of the flow is itself the best corrective. When stagnation sets in, then comes the danger. So it is for the teacher, more than the pupil, to beware of wrong-doing."³⁴ It shows that Tagore does not want teachers to be seriously perturbed or be upset with undue uneasiness at the mischievous deeds of young children, who only exhibit their playful spirit in their outburst of over-enthusiasm, which once spent will do no harm. It is just a natural art of self-expression of the playful child, whose nature is to be mischievous.

Tagore accounts the healthy atmosphere of his school to be chiefly responsible for its smooth running. To put it in his own words "For the most important element of it is the atmosphere and the fact that it is not a school which is imposed upon the boys by autocratic authorities. I always try to impress upon their minds that it is their own

34. Pages 62-63, *Reminiscences*—Rabindranath Tagore, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1954.

world, upon which their life ought fully and freely to react. In the school administration they have their place and in the matter of punishment we mostly rely on their own court of justice.”³⁵ Since one of Tagore’s aims of education was freedom of mind, he believed that it could be achieved only through the path of freedom. Naturally, his object in education was to make the children happy and give them as much freedom as he possibly could.

He describes as follows the way in which he dealt with the students of his school: “I never said to them—Don’t do this, or don’t do that. I never prevented them from climbing trees or going about where they liked. From the very first I trusted them ! and they always responded to my trust. Parents used to send me their most difficult children, who were supposed to be incorrigible. When the children found themselves in an atmosphere of freedom and trust, they never gave me any trouble. The boys were encouraged to manage their own affairs and to elect their own judge, if any punishment was to be given. I never punished them myself.”³⁶ The above is an illustration of the system of self-discipline created through self-management of the students themselves, in dealing with problems of discipline. Tagore has employed psychological methods with good results in dealing with problem children. He has avoided corporal punishment, as far as possible, so that, the boys might acquire a sense of self-discipline and correct themselves by self-analysis—by reasoning and understanding what is really for their own good. In Tagore’s *Siksha Satra* “no coercion is employed to enforce discipline among the boys ; they must

35. Page 9, *My School*—Pamphlet No. 1, Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa Bharati.

36. Page 3. *The Viswa-Bharati*—Rabindranath and Andrews, G. A. Natesan and Co., 1923.

come to realize, of their own accord, what is anti-social and what is desirable. Co-operation here again is encouraged and any disputes that arise are dealt with first in the Vichara-Sabha, or court of justice, where they are settled or punishments meted out to the offenders. A record is kept of these cases, the offences and punishments. Should, however, the Vichara Sabha find itself incompetent to settle a dispute, the matter is taken to the teacher who is addressed as 'dada' (elder brother) and who takes this as an opportunity of demonstrating how useless, wasteful and disturbing to fruitful work are dissensions and quarrels."³⁷

Tagore recognizes the fact that the boys are full of enthusiasm and when they find opportunities for self-expression, they may be a little uncontrollable. He could rather enjoy the children expressing themselves freely in their outbursts of playful spirit which may seem uncontrollable, but not tolerate the repression of the child with no freedom to expand. Therefore, after analysing the psychological cause of indiscipline, he gave the children unrestricted freedom to do whatever they liked. An illustration of it is to be found in the Siksha-Satra, where "another way of dealing with indiscipline is to discover what psychological cause gave rise to this state ; boys who have means of self-expression through an occupation or interest are often unruly. Whereas, in some homes the children are repressed, in the Siksha-Satra they find themselves free to expand. There is so much for them to do, so much to occupy their minds with the workshop, gardening, fishing, cooking their own food, singing, playing, painting, going for walks, in all of which they are unobstructed and receive sympathetic response to their creative demands. Many

37. Page 5. *Siksha Satra*, An Experiment in Rural Education at Sriniketan, Bulletin No. 21. Viswa-Bharati, Jan., 1949.

psychological complexes are thus eliminated and indiscipline or "naughtiness" seldom occurs."³⁸

Further, Tagore has discovered that the secret of maintaining discipline lies in the development of an integrated personality. He recognized that the mind had faculties which were universal but its habits were insular. When children are given sufficient scope for their self-assertion through various media of self-expression, it will naturally result in self-discipline. He aptly points out: "In every-day life our personality moves in a narrow circle of immediate self-interest. Therefore, our feelings and events, within that short range, become prominent subjects for ourselves. In their vehement self-assertion they ignore their unity with the All. They rise up like obstructions and obscure their own background. But art gives our personality the disinterested freedom of the eternal, there to find it in its true perspective."³⁹ Thus, according to Tagore, art is one of the best media for perfecting discipline in man.

According to Tagore, man cannot grow to his full stature and realise his complete being, unless his personality is fully developed. Therefore, he points out that the repressed personality of man generates an inflammable moral gas, deadly in its explosive force. He holds the view that so long as the modern society loses the force of the ideal of wholeness, the different sections are bound to become detached and resolve into their elemental character of forces.

In bringing about proper integration in the personality of children his approach is a synthetic one,—emphasis on the constructive and creative aspects

38. Page 6—*Ibid.*

39. Page 39—*Creative Unity*—Rabindranath Tagore, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1950 (Indian Edition).

in education. It is his belief that the result of repressed personality will be nothing short of universal disruption in the long run. He would like people to make space in their society for the minds of their children so that they could grow in the ideal of human dignity, unhindered by restrictions, unjust and irrational. What he detests most is children being caught in the grip of rigid restrictions and the consequent repression of individual freedom.

He is keenly aware of the fact that the people are living beings and that they have their distinct personalities. Therefore, the people being living personalities, according to him, they must have their self-expression which will lead to their distinctive creations. Those creations may be either literature, art, social symbols or ceremonials. They would be like different dishes at one common feast, adding richness to one's enjoyment and understanding of truth, at the same time making the world of men fertile of life and variedly beautiful. That shows clearly how Tagore recognizes the truth that man as a person has his individuality which is the field where his spirit has its freedom to express itself and to grow.

Tagore wanted the children of his educational institution to have full freedom of inquiry and experiment ; so that, they could have a wonderful vision of an overflowing life, full of vigour and vitality and also give voice to immortal thoughts. That was why he did not like human beings caught in the grip of an inelastic educational system, forcibly holding them fixed and ignoring the laws of life and growth.

He recognised the immense educational value of travel. He believed in the universal faculties of the human mind and thought that it was only habits which made men insular in their

outlook. When he speaks about travel and its values in education, he does not think of mere hurried visits and excursions which are made in haste, resulting in no perfect knowledge of men and things—no rounded completeness. Speaking about the incompleteness or imperfections of such casual contacts, Tagore points out : “The modern age has brought the geography of the earth near to us, but made it difficult for us to come into touch with man. We go to strange lands and observe ; we do not live there. We hardly meet men ; but only specimens of knowledge. We are in haste to seek for general types and overlook individuals.”⁴⁰

Thus, it is clear from the above that Tagore emphasises the need for heart contacts, personal and human relationships, if there is to be perfect understanding of each other. He aptly remarks : “When we fall into the habit of neglecting to use the understanding that comes of sympathy in our travels, our knowledge of foreign people grows insensitive, and therefore, easily becomes both unjust and cruel in its character, and also selfish and contemptuous in its application. Such has often been the case with regard to the meeting of Western people in our days with others for whom they do not recognise any obligation of kinship.”⁴¹ It may be difficult for individuals of a particular country to understand the individuals of another country ; mutual understanding may be either aided or else obstructed by the general emanations forming the social atmosphere, which in turn are the collective ideas and collective feelings generated according to special historical circumstances. Only a dispassionate study can dispel the misconceptions and misunderstandings.

40. Page 95—*Ibid.*

41. Page 95—*Ibid.*

Dwelling upon the immense value of man's living relationship with man, Tagore observes : "Wherever man meets man in a living relationship, the meeting finds its natural expression in works of art, the signatures of beauty, in which the mingling of the personal touch leaves its memorial."⁴² On the other hand, he points out that "a relationship of pure utility humiliates man—it ignores the rights and needs of his deeper nature ; it feels no compunction in maltreating and killing things of beauty that can never be restored."⁴³

Even though there was no religious education at Tagore's educational institution, religion was made the background of everything. With regard to the religious atmosphere of Santiniketan, its essential note was freedom. Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, the poet's father, laid down three simple principles to be observed within the precincts of his Ashram : no image should be made the object of worship, no word of religious controversy should be spoken and no injury should be done to the life of bird or beast. The actual words of the Maharshi are still to be seen engraven on stone in the Ashram, which form, as it were, a charter of universality on the basis of which Viswa-Bharati was established. Everybody was expected to worship the one invisible God and only such instructions were given as were consistent with the worship, the praise and the contemplation of the Creator and Sustainer of the world and were productive of good morals, religious life and universal brotherhood.

Thus, freedom was a distinguishing feature of the religious life of Santiniketan. It did not mean that it led to any vagueness or indifference as to ultimate spiritual truth. By good teaching which

42. Page 115—*Ibid.*

43. Page 115—*Ibid.*

roused the boys' interest, Tagore opened their minds to the great world of truth—through contact with nature, music and poetry and through feelings of sympathy with animals. He did not believe in teaching religion to children through set lessons at schools. According to him, true religion is not merely knowing any set of historical facts, but feeling the reality of God. He thought that children would learn of God naturally, if only they lived with people who loved and worshipped Him and with the beautiful things which God pours into His world. There was a glass *mandir* at Santiniketan which was open to the air on all sides. It was the school chapel. There worship was conducted twice a week by the poet when present, and by teachers in his absence. In the morning and evening a period used to be set apart for meditation, during which the children were expected to sit in silence for a quarter of an hour. Of course they were not compelled to meditate, but were insisted upon to remain quiet and not disturb others. He would not tell them what they should think about in the silence or ask them afterwards how they had spent their time. It was his belief that the time of quiet meditation was in itself good not only for body but also for mind and spirit and that the beauty of their surroundings would by itself and without any effort, help their minds to grow. After the hour of meditation, the whole school would gather together for a common prayer in which people of every religion could join. When chanting the prayer, Tagore used to take care to see that all his boys understood the meaning of the words.

Tagore has faith in a spiritual world—not as anything separate from this world—but as its innermost truth. Experience of this spiritual world, according to Tagore is to be gained by children by fully living in it and not through the medium of theological instruction. To Tagore, the great gift

of ancient India was her meditative calm which he wished to recapture in the atmosphere of his educational institution.

According to Tagore, "Teaching of religion can never be imparted in the form of lessons; it is there where there is religion in living... ..Religion is not a fractional thing that can be doled out in fixed weekly or daily measures as one among various subjects. It is the truth of our complete being, the consciousness of our personal relationship with the infinite. It is the true centre of gravity of our life."⁴⁴ It is his conviction that such a state could be attained during one's childhood by daily living in a place where the truth of the spiritual world will not be obscured by necessities assuming artificial importance; where life will be simple, surrounded by fullness of leisure, by ample space and pure air and profound peace of nature; and where men will live with a perfect faith in the eternal life before them.

Therefore, in the matter of religious education, Tagore's note is one of freedom and not one of compulsion. He pleads for complete freedom of the child to wander on the limitless horizon of solitary thought and meditation, in touch with the still small voice within. The kind of freedom that Tagore aims at is not limited to mere religious education alone. According to him the child must have complete freedom to adventure in the realm of song, of poetry, of music if it wishes, of drama and dance and even to revel in the expression of ideas through colour, line or form. Life, to be life at all, must be lived and it is quite likely that the parents' or professors' sins of repression and deprivation, of rod and iron bound rule, will be visited upon the children even unto the third and fourth generation, and may yet lead civilization to doom.

44. *Viswa Bhaati Quarterly*, Vol. XIII, Parts I and II, May-Oct—1947.

PART III

Educational Ideas and Ideals of Gandhi and Tagore

A Comparative Study

Both Gandhi and Tagore considered educational institutions as only instruments of knowledge and they did not look upon either school or collegiate education as mere ends in themselves. They belong to the same school of thought in the sense that they did not regret very much for not having attended either the school or the college regularly. They believed that much could be learnt by experience, that is, in the hard school of life. In an article of the *Young India*, Gandhi wrote, "It is a great superstition to suppose that knowledge can be obtained only by going to schools and colleges. The world produced brilliant students before schools and colleges came into being."¹ Mahatma Gandhi laid more emphasis on self study than on mere school or collegiate education, since he believed that schools and colleges were only one of the means of obtaining knowledge—school or collegiate education was not the be-all and end-all of life. Having been dissatisfied with the worst conditions that were obtained in the school of his days, he wanted to revolutionise education and see that every school be made an ideal place or a factory for building character. Rabindranath also held similar views

1. Page 210—*To The Students*—M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan 1949.

in these matters, regarding the value of school and collegiate education. Had he not been completely dissatisfied with the unhealthy atmosphere and unpsychological methods of teaching in the school of his days he would not have fled the school so early. He was as much a realist in education as Gandhi was, in the sense that he believed that the school was not the only place where all that has to be learnt is necessarily taught there. Just like Gandhi, he holds the view that true education is a life-long process and much is learnt only in, and through life.

Neither Gandhi nor Rabindranath Tagore attached any undue importance to the mere storing of information, and craving for it without real understanding of it. Now-a-days there is a tendency on the part of some people to consider more information as equivalent to knowledge or culture. Both Gandhi and Tagore are best correctives of the modern but unhealthy tendencies in education in the sense, that they have been chiefly responsible for lifting the veil of matter that has been blocking the vision of truth. They have opened the eyes of the public to the immense possibilities of the spirit force or soul force as opposed to the purely material force. Gandhi greatly regrets that modern education had turned the eyes of the people away from the spirit. Similarly, Tagore is quite outspoken when he says, "That which merely gives us information can be explained in terms of measurement, but that which gives us joy cannot be explained by the facts of a mere grouping of atoms and molecules. Somewhere in the arrangement of this world there seems to be a great concern about giving us delight, which shows that in the Universe over and above the meaning of matter and force there is a message conveyed through the magic touch of personality. This touch cannot be analysed.

It can only be felt.”² Again, he refers to the futility of mere information in getting the real truth of things and points out, “Mere information of facts, mere discovery of power, belongs to the outside and not to the inner soul of things.”³

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore had balanced views on Education. They look at education as a whole and not as water tight compartments. The general aim of education for both is the harmonious development of personality even though the approach to the goal is different for each. For instance, Gandhi considers education to be an all round drawing out of the best in child and man—body, mind and spirit. His aim, therefore, is the highest development possible of the body, mind and soul. Similarly, Tagore also approaches education with a totality of vision—a myriad minded awareness of its innumerable implications. His object of education is to give man the unity of truth. “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information, but makes our life in harmony with all existence.”⁴ This shows that Tagore’s purpose of education is nothing short of the highest purpose of man, namely the fullest growth and freedom of soul.

Both aim at freedom in education and want it to be as natural as possible. For Tagore, the most important factor in education is the inspiring atmosphere of creative activity. He wants education to be a joyous adventure and not a rigorous task. He also emphasised the fact, that education to be true, should be in full touch with complete life,

2. Page 15 *Lectures And Addresses*—Rabindranath Tagore (Selected by Anthony and Soares) Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1950.

3. Page 16—*Ibid.*

4. Page 2. *My School*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati, Pamphlet No. 1.

economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual." For, true education is to realize at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings."⁵

Both Gandhi and Tagore are unique in their plea for more simplicity and naturalness in education than it has been before. Since both of them were the products of the western system of education which was given at enormous expense for the common man, they condemned it as unsuitable and unnecessary for the country. In its place they wanted to introduce a certain element of simplicity. For instance, Tagore humorously points out, "To make the paraphernalia of our Education so expensive that Education itself becomes difficult of attainment would be like squandering all one's money in buying money-bags."⁶ Moreover, he says, "The simplicity of which I speak is not merely the effect of a lack of superfluity; it is one of the signs of perfection. It is for lack of this simplicity that the necessities of life have become so rare and costly."⁷ Tagore would not believe that highest education was to be had only in the tallest edifices. In this connection, Tagore points out, "To be simple without becoming poorer is the problem which each must solve according to his temperament. But while we are ever ready to accept the subject matter from outside, it is too bad to thrust on us the temperament as well."⁸ Thus, it may be found that while aiming at naturalness in education, Tagore condemns complete imitation of the West.

Gandhi wants education to be very simple for

5. Page 2—*The Centre of Indian Culture*—Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati Bookshop, 1951.

6. Page 6—*Ibid.*

7. Page 7—*Ibid.*

8. Page 8—*Ibid.*

the very reason that it should be universal. That was why he wanted to make education self-supporting. Lamenting the hostile atmosphere around the students he felt that instead of the sacred surroundings of a rishi-guru ashrama and his paternal care, the students were having the atmosphere of a broken down home and the artificial surroundings created by the modern system of education. Referring to the enormous cost of education for the common man, Gandhi says, "There is too for us, the inordinately expensive education, when it is difficult for millions even to make the two ends meet, when millions are dying of starvation, it is monstrous to think of giving our relatives a costly education. Expansion of the mind will come from hard experience, not necessary from the college or the school education."⁹ The enormous cost of education for the common man made him think in terms of the millions and not the privileged few and naturally it led him on to the Charka, which he said, should be the centre of all educational arrangements.

The simplicity aimed at by both Tagore and Gandhi was not merely confined to the buildings but was wider in its range of applicability ; it extended even to the way of life of the students. By emphasising simplicity of living, they did not mean the glorification of poverty as such. For instance, Tagore observes : "Poverty brings us into complete touch with life and the world, for living mostly by proxy and thus living in a world of lesser reality. This may be good for one's pleasure and pride, but not for one's education. Wealth is a golden cage in which the children of the rich are bred into artificial deadening of their powers."¹⁰

9. Page 75—*To The Students*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

10. Page 3 —*My School*—Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati, Pamphlet No. 1.

Both the educationists were spiritualists in education, in the sense that they equated the highest purpose of education to the highest purpose of man. Tagore explains, "I believe in a spiritual world—not as anything separate from this world—but as its innermost truth. With the breath we draw we must always feel this truth, that we are living in God."¹¹ Tagore refused to believe that man's birth in this world was just an accident or a dream of a dreamer but attributed to it a spiritual significance. He makes that clear when he says, "We have a personality to which matter and force are unmeaning unless related to something intimately personal, whose nature we have discovered, in some measure in human love, in the greatness of the good, in the martyrdom of heroic souls, in the ineffable beauty of nature which can never be a physical fact nor anything but an expression of personality."¹² This shows Tagore's faith in spiritual values.

Gandhi had similar faith in spiritual values. In fact, he attached far more importance to spiritual values in education than anything else. He aptly points out in this connection: "Modern education tends to turn our eyes away from the spirit. The possibilities of the spirit force or soul force do not appeal to us and our eyes are consequently rivetted on the evanescent, transitory material force. Surely this is the very limit of dull unimaginativeness."¹³ Further Gandhi points out, while once addressing the students, "All your scholarship, all your study of Shakespeare and Wordsworth would be vain if at the same time you do not build your character

11. Page 4—*Ibid.*

12. Page 4—*Ibid.*

13. Page 190—*To The Students*—Mahatma Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

and attain mastery over your thought and action.”¹⁴

Gandhi and Tagore were identical in emphasising the fact that there should be a close relationship between education and the economic life of a country. This is very well illustrated by Tagore when he says, that, “True education is to realise at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings.”¹⁵ Rabindranath had always recognized that education must have close association with the economic life of the people and that the centre of culture must also cultivate land, weave cloth and produce the necessities of life, uniting teachers and students in productive activities on co-operative principles.

Gandhi also strikes the same note but in a different vein, when he deplors that there is no correspondence between the education that is given and the home life and the village life. According to him, the then prevailing system of education did not correspond to the requirements of life of the country. That shows his enthusiasm and earnestness for establishing a close relationship between education and economic life of the country. The Basic Scheme of Gandhi and the Viswa-Bharati of Tagore are thus experiments in supplying the missing link in modern education—a national system of education, essentially based on the organic unity of India’s mind, life and culture.

Neither Gandhi nor Tagore ignored the cultural values in education. They did not believe in mere book-learning but emphasised the importance of

14. Page 181—*Ibid.*

15. Page 2—*The Centre of Indian Culture*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharti Bookshop, 1951.

close and personal contacts between the teacher and the taught. Tagore is outspoken, when he says, that, "Communication of life can only be through a living agency. And culture, which is the life of mind, can only be imparted through man to man. Book-learning or scriptural texts may merely make us pedants. They are static and quantitative; they accumulate and are hoarded up under strict guards. Culture grows and moves and multiplies itself in life."¹⁶

Similarly, Gandhi observes : "And as one who has had some experience of life, take it from me that mere book reading will be of little help to you in after life. I know from correspondence with the students all over India, what wrecks they have become by stuffing their brains with information derived from a cart-load of books."¹⁷ He considers culture of the mind to be subservient to the culture of the heart. He attaches far more importance to character rather than to mere scholarship.

Both emphasise human relations in the teaching—learning process—the need for personal intimacy and heart contacts. Tagore points out that students in Western Universities have the advantage of human environment of culture in their society and they acquire their learning direct from their teachers; whereas, in India, the teachers maintain social distance from the students. Tagore thus deplores : "To our misfortune, we have, in our own country, all the furniture of the European University—except the human teacher. We have instead, merely purveyors of book-lore, in whom the paper-god of the book-shop seems to have made himself vocal. And as a natural result, we find

16. Page 13—*Ibid.*

17. Page 179—*To The Students*—Mahatma Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

our students to be untouchable even to our Indian Professors. These teachers distribute their doles of mental food, gingerly and from a dignified distance, raising walls of note-books between themselves and their students. This kind of food is neither relished nor does it give nourishment. It is a famine ration strictly regulated to save us, not from emaciation but only from absolute death. It holds out no hope of that culture which is far in excess of man's mere necessity. It is certainly less than enough and far less than a feast."¹⁸

Dr. Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi considered culture to be universal and not a monopoly of the privileged few. Tagore expresses it very aptly when he says, "The best and noblest gifts of humanity, cannot be the monopoly of a particular race or country, its scope may not be limited nor may it be regarded as the miser's hoard buried underground."¹⁹ In this connection Tagore also points out, "We should remember that the doctrine of special creation is out of date and the idea of a specially favoured race belongs to a barbaric age. We have come to understand in modern times that any special truth or special culture which is wholly dissociated from the universal is not true at all. Only a prisoner condemned to a solitary cell is separate from the world."²⁰

Tagore's synthetic approach to culture is quite evident when he observss, "It will not do to keep our culture so reverently shackled with chains of gold. The age has come when all artificial fences are breaking down. Only that will serve

18. Page 14—*The Centre of Indian Culture*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Bookshop, 1951.

19. Page 4—*Crisis in Civilization*—Rabindranath, Tagore, Viswa-Bharti Bookshop, 1941.

20. Page 28—*The Centre of Indian Culture*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharti Bookshop, 1951.

which is basically consistent with the universal, while that which seeks safety in the out-of-the-way Whole of the special will perish.”²¹ Again he points out, “But before we are in a position to stand a comparison with the other cultures of the world, or truly to co-operate with them, we must base our own culture on a synthesis of all the different cultures we have.”²² Thus Tagore makes a strong plea for cultural synthesis. In his admiration of the heritage of Indian culture, he does not distrust any other culture simply because of its foreign character. On the contrary, what he objected to, was the artificial arrangement by which the foreign education in India tended to occupy all the space of the national mind which stood in the way of creation of a new thought-power by a new combination of truths.

Similarly, Gandhi’s attachment to cultural values in education is none the less. It is evident when he says, “I attach far more importance to the cultural aspect of education than to the literary. Inner culture must be reflected in your speech, the way in which you treat visitors and guests and behave towards one another and your teachers and elders.”²³

The two great educational thinkers did not discount the past in their fascination for certain reforms in the educational system of the day. They had great regard for the good things in India’s cultural past and wanted to benefit from it to the extent possible and not completely do away with them as sometimes some people discard the old things. Gandhi in his own way appeals to the students in

21. Page 30—*Ibid.*

22. Page 31—*Ibid.*

23. Page 291—*To The Students*—M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

the following manner : "It is the fashion in some quarters nowadays for the young to discredit whatever may be said by old people. I am not prepared to say that there is absolutely no justification for this belief. But I warn the youth of the country against always discounting whatever old men or women may say for the mere fact that it is said by such persons. Even as wisdom often comes from the mouths of babies so does it often come from the mouths of old people."²⁴ As a golden rule he suggests that everything may be tested in the light of reasons and experience, no matter from whom it comes.

Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore, in his plea for restoring the good in the past remarks : "There are some who are insularly modern, who believe that the past is the bankrupt time, leaving no assets for us but only a legacy of debts. They refuse to believe that the army that is marching forward can be fed from the rear. It is well to remind them that the great ages of renaissance in history were those when men suddenly discovered the seeds of thought in the granary of the past."²⁵ Again he points out : "The unfortunate people who have lost the harvest of their past have lost their present age. They have missed their seeds for cultivation and go a-begging for their bare livelihood."²⁶ He does not want the people of India to think that they are paupers with nothing to bank upon but calls upon them on the other hand to break open the rich treasure-trove of the ancestors of the country and make their future their own and not continue as eternal beggars. Thus, Tagore strikes a timely note to the modern-educated

24. Pages—237, 238, *Ibid.*

25. Page—36 *The Centre of Indian Culture*—
Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Bookshop, 1951.

26. Page 36—*Ibid.*

youth, that by distrusting the past he is literally losing his present and becomes disinherited.

Both the educationists under consideration, have recognised the importance and value of creative activities in education but the approach of each has been different. Tagore being himself a many-sided genius, laid more emphasis on music, poetry and fine arts as the highest means of national self-expression. Gandhi was more utilitarian in his approach ; whereas Tagore was more artistic. Gandhi wanted the whole of education to be activity-centred, based on a craft suitable to the genius of the people of the locality and at the same time wanted it to be self-supporting. On the other hand, Tagore thought more in terms of the aesthetic life of man without which one remains inarticulate. Therefore, in Tagore's conception, utility is not the criteria as in the case of Mahatma Gandhi, but the pleasure derived through expressing oneself. Gandhi had implicit faith in the useful and deliberate activities of the conscious mind ; whereas, for Tagore the conscious mind occupied only a superficial layer of one's life. Therefore, for Tagore, the sub-conscious mind is equally important where dwells the soul and it must have its adequate media of expression. What are these media of expression ? According to Tagore, "These media are poetry and music and the arts ; herein the complete personality of man finds its utterance."²⁷

The educational system of Gandhi is no doubt creative; but the educational system of Rabindranath is artistically creative. That is clear when Rabindranath says, "Must ours be the education of a prison-house, with hard labour and with a drab dress out to the limits of a minimum decency and necessity ? Do we not know that the perfection of

colour and form and expression belongs to the perfection of vitality—that the joy of life is only the other side of the strength of life.”²⁸

The essential difference in their approach becomes clear when Tagore is found to observe: “We see the European where he is learned, where he is masterful, where he is busily constructive in his trade and politics, but not where he is artistically creative. That is the reason why modern Europe has not been revealed to us in her complete personality but only in her intellectual power and utilitarian activities; and therefore, she has only touched our intellect and evoked our utilitarian ambitions. The mutilation of life owing to the narrowness of culture must no longer be encouraged.”²⁹ Thus, Tagore considers the co-ordination of all cultural resources necessary for the perfection of mental life.

Mahatma Gandhi as well as Rabindranath Tagore recognised the greatness of all religions and both emphasised the need for a comparative study of world religions. They were not sectarian in their outlook when they stressed the necessity of a careful study of different religions in a comparative setting. For instance, Tagore’s view of religion is characterised by freedom. He believes in the personal experience of this spiritual world rather than in religious instructions. He thought that true religion was more a matter of personal experience than that of mere instruction and therefore it has to be gained by children by fully living in it and by gaining an intimate vision of eternal life. To attain that totality of vision, Tagore provided the proper atmosphere of living aspiration—that of an Ashram in his institution. He set apart fifteen

28. Page 37—*Ibid.*

29. Pages 38.-39—*Idid.*

minutes daily, both in the early hours of the morning and evening for his students even though there was no compulsion about it. Students were expected to be quiet and to meditate during those hours, to exercise their power of self-control. Even though the students were given complete freedom to do what-ever they liked during these hours, they were generally found to be devoting those precious hours to deep meditation in the secluded places of the Ashram and never dissipate their energies recklessly.

It was Tagore's firm conviction that "Teaching of religion can never be imparted in the form of lessons, it is there where there is religion in living. Therefore, the ideal of the forest colony of seekers of God as the true school of spiritual life holds good even in this age. Religion is not a fractional thing that can be doled out in fixed weekly or daily measures as one among various subjects in the school syllabus. It is the truth of our complete being, the consciousness of our personal relationship with the infinite. It is the true centre of gravity of our life. This we can attain during our childhood by daily living in a place where the truth of the spiritual world is not obscured by a crowd of necessities assuming artificial importance, where life is simple, surrounded by fulness of leisure, by ample space and pure air and profound peace of nature and where men live with a perfect faith in the eternal life before them."³⁰ As rightly observed by C.F. Andrews, "The poet's own fundamental thought, both of religion and education alike, implies essentially a life lived in harmony with nature, not a life cut off from the heart of nature by artificial barriers of man's devising."³¹ C. F. Andrews recap-

30. Page 7—*My School*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati, Pamphlet No. 1.

31. Page 40—*The Viswa-Bharati*—Rabindranath and Andrews, G. A. Natesan and Co., 1923.

tures the spirit of Santiniketan wherein the atmosphere was congenial for a true life of religion, in the following sentences : "It follows from this that in Viswa-Bharati, the education given is not merely a matter of books and classrooms and blackboards and written examination papers. It is an education received and imparted within the lap of nature herself, beneath the shade of overhanging trees and under the open sky, at the festival of the full-moon and through the music that ushers in the coming of the rains. On every side and by every means, the teaching given in the Ashram is kept in unison with God's marvellous creation, in the midst of which we have our own place and function as well as other creatures. This implies a growth of intimate relationship with all that lives and moves around us. It means also a tenderness towards those creatures which live their life side by side with us in our surroundings."³²

Mahatma Gandhi firmly believed in prayer as a necessary spiritual discipline. At the same time, just like Tagore, he did not worry himself too much about the form of prayer. What he was particular about, was, the spirit in which prayer was done — the purity of heart and concentration of mind. It was his conviction that prayer was the only means of bringing about orderliness, peace and repose in the daily acts of the people.

While Tagore did not believe in religious instructions, Gandhi advocated them. But that did not mean that Gandhi favoured sectarian religion. Far from it. His conception of true religion was very different from that of an ordinary man. To him religion meant truth and ahimsa or rather truth alone because truth included ahimsa, ahimsa being the necessary and indispensable means for its discovery. He thought that the evils of sectarian

religious instructions would disappear with the evolution of true religion. To Gandhi, the abandoning of religious instructions would amount to letting a field fallow and allow weeds to grow for want of the tiller's knowledge of the proper use of the field. In his scheme of things religious instructions formed an integral part of education and it embraced the broader aspects of religion. His curriculum of religious instructions included a study of the tenets of all other faiths. Study and appreciation of other religions for him, would mean, not a weakening of one's regard for his religion but, on the other hand, an extension of that regard to other religions as well. He aptly remarks that, "this study of other religions besides one's own will give one a grasp of the rock bottom unity of all religions and afford a glimpse also of that universal and absolute truth which lies beyond the dust of creeds and faiths."³³ According to Gandhi, education thus becomes truly liberal only when it includes a reverent study of other faiths.

Mahatma Gandhi was definitely convinced about the fact that religious instructions should be provided even though there would be difficulties in the way, because of so many denominations in India. That was why, he firmly and boldly affirmed, "If India is not to declare spiritual bankruptcy, religious instructions of its youth must be held to be at least as necessary as secular instructions. It is true that knowledge of religious books is no equivalent of that of religion. But if we cannot have religions, we must be satisfied with providing our boys and girls with what is next best."³⁴

Since both the educationists were products of

33. Pages 162-163—*To The Students*—M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1949.

34. Page 104—*To The Students*—M. K. Gandhi—Navajivan, 1949.

the Western system of education, they knew what hardships they encountered during their early days when they had to learn everything through a foreign medium. It was a time when an altogether artificial value was placed on English collegiate education. Both the thinkers were lovers of English ; but they did not want it to be either a medium of instruction in Indian schools and colleges or be India's lingua franca. To quote Gandhi, "I do not say that you should not learn English ; learn it by all means. But so far as I can see, it cannot be the language of the millions of Indian homes. It will be confined to thousands or tens of thousands ; but it will not reach the millions."³⁵ Since Gandhi wanted education to be universal and not be restricted to a few, naturally the medium, in his opinion, could not be anything other than the mother tongue. Further, he keenly felt that the foreign medium was primarily responsible for the hiatus between the thought world of the educated and the illiterate masses and also between the thought world of men and women in India. Therefore, it was his intense desire to bridge that gap and in his opinion, it could be done only when the mother tongue was made the medium of learning and not the foreign tongue.

There were many who thought that Gandhi out and out hated English language. It is further away from the truth. While he appreciated the beauty of the English language and its wealth of ideas, at the same time he was not unaware of the difficulties of mastering that language by the ordinary Indian. He knew perfectly well that for a child to be forced to think in a foreign language was criminal and therefore, he thought that English was occupying an unnatural place in India and doing violence to the manhood and womanhood of

India. What is then the place of English in his scheme of educational reconstruction ? It is his considered opinion that, "English is a language of international commerce, it is the language of diplomacy and it contains many a rich literary treasure, it gives an introduction to western thought and culture. For a few of us, therefore, a knowledge of English is necessary. They can carry on the departments of national commerce and international diplomacy and for giving to the nation the best of western literature, thought and science. That would be the legitimate place of English."³⁶ After having assigned it a legitimate and rightful place, he considers that the highest development of the Indian mind should be possible without a knowledge of English. While making a fervent plea for the mother tongue as medium of instruction, Gandhi very well points out, "I am certain that the children of the nation that receive instruction in a tongue other than their own, commit suicide. It robs them of their birth right. A foreign medium means an undue strain upon the youngsters, it robs them of all originality. It stunts their growth and isolates them from their home. I regard such a thing as a national tragedy."³⁷

Tagore's attitude towards English is not one of hatred but characterised by love. At the same time he does not favour English being adopted as a medium of instruction. Speaking about English being the medium, Tagore observes : "When we come to consider the question of the spread of education with the requisite attention, we discover that the foremost difficulty lies in English being the medium of education. The foreign ship may bring imported goods into a port but she cannot help

36. Pages, 52-53, *To The Students*—M. K. Gandhi, *Nava-jivan*, 1949.

37. Page 127—*Ibid*.

to distribute them among inland markets. So, if we insist on pinning our whole faith to the foreign ship, our commerce must needs be restricted to the city.”³⁸ Tagore was therefore definitely convinced that higher education should be given through our own language and only when so imparted could it become truly fruitful in society.

Analysing the difficulties of mastering the foreign language, Tagore points out from his own experience that a certain proportion of students are naturally deficient in the power of learning languages and therefore, in such cases, there will definitely be insufficient understanding and inevitable failures in the higher stages. Another difficulty that he found out in mastering the foreign language was that it was a hard nut to crack for one whose mother-tongue was different. He also found out that much of the difficulty was due to lack of proper training of the pupils at the hands of competent teachers. Even though a few intelligent students somehow managed to get through by cramming, it was found to be a great obstacle for the average who could neither get through the closed doors of the language barrier, nor had they any other means of escape by jumping over it.

How would Tagore overcome the obstacle? His proposal is “to have a bifurcation of the language media beginning from the preparatory class, before the matriculation, so that each may choose the portal through which he would enter his University course. This, as I have said, would not only tend to lessen the crowding along the old course, but also make for a much wider spread of higher education.”³⁹

38. Page 368, *Modern Review*, Vol. XXII. Oct. 1917.

39. Page 369—*Ibid.*

Weighing the results of learning through a foreign medium, Tagore observes : "Though we have been enjoying high education, we have not been thinking high thoughts. Like our academic costume, the academic language of our education is cast aside as soon as we are back home from college and all that we have gathered there is left in its pockets as it hangs on the peg."⁴⁰ Again he points out : "What we imbibe does not increase our vital force, for we do not taste it with our tongues; what goes down our gullets only loads our stomach, but fails to nourish our bodies"⁴¹

Speaking about the efficiency of teaching through the mother tongue, Tagore points out : "For it is certain that in a very short time, the lecturers in the mother tongue will begin to express the whole of their true genius and those who are now occupied only with raising the dust of synonyms and annotations in the process of explaining the English text, will be able to scatter vivifying ideas over their famishing country."⁴² Again he observes : "Nothing makes our education here more futile than that the knowledge we gain does not enrich our language and that being left for ever outside the highest thought, the growth of our mother-tongue fails to keep pace with the growth of our minds."⁴³ Since learning through a foreign language was a hard struggle for him, he points out an easier approach to the problem. He describes it as follow : "Learning should, as far as possible, follows the process of eating. When the taste begins from the first bite, the stomach is awakened to its functions before it is loaded, so that its digestive powers get full

40. Page 370—*Ibid.*

41. Page 371—*Ibid.*

42. Page 371—*Ibid.*

43. Page 370—*Ibid.*

43. Pages 58—59—*My Reminiscences*—Rabindranath

the Bengali boy is taught in English. The first bite play. Nothing like this happens, however, when bids fair to wrench loose both rows of teeth like a veritable earthquake in the mouth.”⁴⁴

Tagore is not a fanatic or a faddist in regard to his views on the medium of education. The very fact that he made provision for the teaching and study of as many as possible Indian and foreign languages in his educational institution is in itself a clear proof of his broadmindedness and liberal attitude towards other languages as well as his own. It was because he keenly realized the difficulties of overcoming the language barrier, he expressed his views rather authoritatively as follows: “All those peculiar tendernesses and delicate associations of memory that stir us to self-expression, all those immemorial rites and traditions which have cast our minds into their peculiar mould—such things can never find true release in a foreign language.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Tagore points out, in this connection, “Languages are jealous. They do not give up their best for those who try to deal with them through an intermediary belonging to an alien rival. We have to court them in person and dance attendance upon them.”⁴⁶

In the period of transition of switching over from English to the mother-tongue, as medium of instruction, certain natural difficulties and problems are bound to arise. But they are by no means difficult of being solved. Even now, when it has been constitutionally decided that gradually the medium of instruction should be switched on to the vernacular, there are some who entertain certain

44. Pages. 58-59—*My Reminiscences* — Rabindranath Tagore, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1954.

45. Page 154—*Viswa-Bharati*, Nov. Jan. Vol, II, 1945 46.

46. Page 8—*The Religion of an Artist*—Rabindranath Tagore; Viswa-Bharati Bookshop, 1953

strange fears. Their apprehension is that it may be difficult to coin new words, especially in regard to science and technical subjects of study and therefore, in their opinion, lack of standard text-books in the vernaculars for reference and studies may be a great set-back in implementing the scheme. It is this apprehension which makes them to postpone the issue and wait till sufficient text-books in the vernaculars are available for beginning instructions in the vernaculars and therefore till then to continue the English medium.

Tagore and Gandhi ably meet the argument in question. Tagore thus gives his counter-argument : "But unless higher education is given in the language, (of one's own) how are text-books to come into existence. If higher education is to await text-books, then may trees await their foliage and the rivers its banks."⁴⁷ He further continues, "If it be a deficiency to be regretted that there are no text-books in Bengali, then, I repeat, to make this language the vehicle for such education is the only way to remove it."⁴⁸

Regarding the inadequacy or the insufficiency of technical terms in the vernacular, Tagore points out, "we cannot very well expect a mint to go on working if the coins are refused circulation."⁴⁹ From this it is clear that Tagore does not admit the non-acceptance of the newly coined words as sound on the part of the public. Just as newly minted coins, if they are to gain currency have to be first accepted as legal tender, so also, the newly coined words and terminologies have to be admittedly accepted by the public. Therefore, Tagore does not think it impossible to coin new words in the vernacular but he is very much convinced that each and every language has

47. Page 370—*The modern Review*—Vol. XXII, Oct. 1917.

48. Page 370—*Ibid.*

49. Page 370—*Ibid.*

in itself immense possibilities of development. To a doubting mind Tagore points out : "But it is ever so much more to be regretted, whereas we have the means and the materials for a veritable feast of education in our own language, we have no place for it."⁵⁰

Similarly, Gandhi also would not want any one to wait for the preparation of text-books in the vernaculars. In his opinion, "If the medium is changed at once and not gradually, in an incredibly short time we shall find text-books and teachers coming into being to supply the want. And if we mean business, in a year's time we shall find that we need never had been party to the tragic waste of the nation's time and energy in trying to learn the essentials of culture through a foreign medium."⁵¹ The primary condition for success according to Gandhi is, the immediate introduction of the vernacular in place of English as a medium of instruction.

In regard to the difficulties envisaged by some people that technical education could not be imparted easily through the mother-tongue, Gandhi deprecates the suggestion that it would need a lot of research and preparation. He rather considered such of those who were sceptical, as being unaware of the rich treasure of expressions and idioms that were buried in the dialects of the villages. In Gandhi's opinion, there is no need for any one to go to any other foreign language in search for many expressions. For instance, in spite of the shortcomings of his own language, he says, "I must cling to my mother-tongue as to my mother's breast..."⁵²

50. Page 370—*Ibid.*

51. Pages 53 54—*Towards New Education*—M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1953.

52. Page 54—*Ibid.*

While Gandhi does not decry English, he emphasises the vernacular. In his opinion, "India has to flourish in her own climate and scenery, and her own literature even though all the three may be inferior to the English climate, scenery and literature. We and our children must build on our own heritage. If we borrow another, we impoverish our own. We can never grow on foreign victuals. I want the nation to have the treasure contained in that language and for that matter the other languages of the world, through its own vernaculars."⁵³

Having been painfully conscious of the ruins wrought by the foreign medium Gandhi observes: "The foreign medium has made our children practically foreigners in their own land. It is the greatest tragedy of the existing system. The foreign medium has prevented the growth of our vernaculars."⁵⁴ He rather goes to the extent of saying that, "If I had the powers of a despot, I would to-day stop the tuition of our boys and girls through a foreign medium and require all the teachers and professors on pain of dismissal to introduce the change forthwith."⁵⁵ In his view, language was the reflection of one-self and therefore if anybody were to tell him that the Indian languages were too poor to express the best thought, then, he would rather wish that it were wiped out of existence. Hence, he considers that the foreign medium "has caused brain fag, put an undue strain upon the nerves of our children, made them crammers and imitators, unfitted them for original work and disabled them for filtering their learning to the family or the masses."⁵⁶

53. Pages 54—*Ibid.*

54. Page 48—*Ibid.*

55. Page 48—*Ibid.*

56. Page 48—*Ibid.*

Both Gandhi and Tagore aimed at encouraging the mother-tongue for self-expression and both of them stood for simplicity in the use of the language. Tagore believed that there was no use in resisting the spirit of change and therefore, he broke the rigidity in the use of language as a vehicle of self-expression. It was Tagore's firm conviction that "those languages which resisted the spirit of change were doomed and could never produce great harvests of thought and literature."⁵⁷ At the same time he wants the medium to be both moving and pliant. He has brought about a revolutionary change in education, as Gandhi has done, by trying to make the mother-tongue, the medium of instruction and natural expression. Both were emphatic in that respect.

Gandhi depends on a common mission as the chief factor in character-building ; whereas, Tagore depends on a common religion, the religion of man. Gandhi has a definite social purpose in education ; while Tagore envisages a system which serves the purpose of study of truth, for its own sake. Tagore enunciates the social purpose in education as follows : "To introduce into our school an active vigour of work, the joyous exercise of our inventive and constructive energies that help to build up character and by their constant movements naturally sweep away all accumulations of dirt, decay and death. In other words, I always feel the need of the Western genius for imparting to my educational ideal that strength of reality which knows how to clear the path towards a definite end of practical good."⁵⁸ Tagore has not disregarded the operational aspect of truth but in his system the main emphasis is on its manifestation.

57. Page 5 *Lectures and addresses*—Rabindranath Tagore Selected by Anthony X. Soares, (Indian Ed.) MacMillan and Co., 1950

58, Page 86—*Viswa-Bharati Quarterly*, No. XIII, Parts I & II, May-Oct.—1947 Issue.

A comparative study of the two educational systems reveals similarities amounting almost to a blood-relationship and differences which however are not completely irreconcilable. For instance, the Wardha Scheme, even though it includes music, fails to rise to a full realisation of the value of artistic activities as in the scheme of Tagore's education. Tagore includes Art not as a special attainment but as an integral part of education as such. According to him, a larger part of man can never find its expression in the mere language of words. Therefore, it must seek for its other languages—lines and colours, sounds and movements.

Gandhi has given education a machinery much more amenable to control and responsive to stimulus than it was even before ; but he has not provided for a supply of the motive power. Gandhi's educational system straightway starts with the basic assumption that, given a definite objective, the common can live upon it. But only an incomplete emphasis has been placed on the values of life. Really speaking, any mission, social or otherwise can only be nourished and sustained by a deep and abiding realisation of the values of life to provide for, and ensure which, is the greatest task of education. On the other hand, the educational system of Tagore is built on the basis of organic unity. Tagore, in fact, chooses a centre which is universal and all encompassing, the motive force he provides being love, akin to ahimsa of Mahatma Gandhi.

In case of both Gandhi and Tagore, education is an expression of life and also a preparation for it but there are certain fundamental differences. The central purpose of Gandhi's scheme being what it is, it cannot hope to achieve the fulfilment of a larger purpose as a by-product. It will not do to start with one main purpose and include what it

cannot encompass by means of mere addition of details. On the other hand, Tagore makes "life" the centre, not the life of this child or that, nor even a particular aspect of human life in preference to some other, but life as a whole and at its richest and best, jointly lived by teachers and students which will enable the students to plan and live their day-to-day life with maximum profit and enjoyment. Thus, environment receives greater importance than anything else in his system and the educational system becomes more or less an arena of life, not merely of certain types of activities,—life-centric education.

"Each seeks to make his educational system the vehicle of his philosophy of life. This philosophy in each case is the embodiment and final fulfilment of a promise implicit in one major aspect of ancient culture.....Gandhiji's truth and non-violence are akin to, almost identical with Tagore's message of love and universal brotherhood, but still they are marked off as two distinct attitudes towards life. Whereas Gandhiji concentrates on the eternal problem of evil and evolves a philosophy of action like a simplified version of karmayoga suited to the needs and abilities of each and every man, Tagore centres his philosophy on the joy of life, the eternal Ananda of realisation and expression which does not exclude action. Gandhiji establishes the everyday reality of life in his system and saves his education from the danger of 'escapism' in any form he gives it a grip over the student which has so long been the dream of all educationists. Tagore presents reality in its largest perspective yet attained by man and saves education from the danger of all narrow limitations of place and time and people."⁵⁹ Thus, it is clear that the educational systems they envisaged are thoroughly imbued with

their respective life—philosophies as any other creative activity through which they sought to express themselves.

Tagore's educational philosophy has a close relationship to the Basic Education of Mahatma Gandhi in the sense that Tagore does not fail to emphasise the importance of hand work in education. For instance, Tagore points out : "However great a scholar one may be, if he has not educated his body—he has to live a life of dependence on others—in many ways he is an incomplete man."⁶⁰ Tagore thus lays sufficient emphasis on the need for free physical and mental development through different forms of handwork and through direct contact with Nature. Therefore, according to Tagore, true education will not take place without any proper provision of opportunities for creative self-expression and social contacts. In Tagore's scheme of education, the socialization of the individual is as much important as in the Basic educational scheme of Gandhi. Tagore makes a strong plea for the child, next to nature, being brought into touch with the so-called stream of social behaviour through various co-operative activities.

Tagore's scheme of education is not less activity-centred than that of Gandhi's, though not more. The close resemblance between the Basic Scheme and that of Tagore's activity-centred education becomes evident when Tagore points out : "There is a close and inseparable connection between the faculties of mind and the body. Each gains strength by co-operating with the other. If the education of the body does not proceed along with the education of the mind, the latter cannot gather strength. We should know that the great task of our educational effort in our institution is to provide for the

60. Page 48—*Viswa-Bharati Quarterly*, Volume XIII, Parts I & II. Education No. 1947.

education of the mind and all the senses through various activities. I believe that in our Asrama every pupil should be taught to master some form of handwork or other. To learn the particular type of handwork is not the main objective. The fact is that through the exercise of the limbs the mind is also strengthened."⁶¹ There are some who are prone to think that Tagore emphasised only the intellectual aspects and ignored the manual aspects in education, just as there are some others who think that Gandhi over-emphasised the manual aspects and ignored the intellectual aspects in education. People of both of these types are wrong in their judgments of the two great educationists. As far as Tagore is concerned, the medium of self-expression is handwork, music and arts which are the spontaneous overflow of one's deeper nature and magnificence. They are the vehicles of creative self-expression and Tagore puts his emphasis mainly on the creative and artistic aspects ; whereas, Gandhi puts his emphasis mainly on the economic aspects,

CONCLUSION

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore are the two great Indian educators who at the same time happened to be contemporaries. They had different back-grounds no doubt and each distinguished himself in a specific field of activity ; one in the field of politics and the other in the literary field. Mahatma Gandhi is generally known to the world as a great politician and Rabindranath as a great poet. But besides the specific field, each one has shown considerable interest in the field of education as in other aspects of life and as a result of their bold experiments in education of a varied nature, they have distinguished themselves as great experimenters in education.

The genesis of the Basic Education Scheme dates back to 1937 when Gandhi wrote a series of articles in the Harijan, his weekly paper, discussing therein Indian education critically and pointing out some of its outstanding defects. It was his main thesis that education was out of tune with life and did not take into account the needs and problems of the masses. While life is practical and productive, the school is mainly a place of book learning. Therefore, it fails to train students for the demands of an active, social and practical life. In his opinion, a village boy who has to find his livelihood and his life interests in agriculture and allied forms of manual work, does not become a better farmer or a better citizen by receiving stereo-typed instruction in the three R's, which are generally divorced from the concrete realities and problems of life. He presented the revolutionary idea that all primary education must be centered on some kind of craft work and every item of knowledge that is taught should be closely related to the basic craft chosen. He even went to the length of suggesting that all knowledge that cannot be co-related with the basic

craft and cannot be taught as arising naturally out of the craft activities should be dropped, on the assumption that if it cannot be so related it is not of fundamental importance.

The education contemplated by the Basic Education Scheme aimed at giving to all the children the basic or fundamental knowledge and skills without which no one could live efficiently or happily in the complicated world of to-day. The scheme was called National because, for the first time in the modern period, it was to be given a nation-wide scope ; it was to be National also in the sense that its ideology was indigenous rather than borrowed, and it refused to adopt the cast-off clothing of English education as it used to be decades earlier. The scheme aimed at universal compulsory free education. It postulates that compulsory education must be provided for a period of at least seven years from the age of seven to the age of fourteen. Education must be imparted through the mother tongues. In order to bring education nearer to life and to redress the balance between theory and practice it aimed at relating education to the basic interests of the child mind and the basic occupations of community life. The Basic Scheme has far-reaching implications, if viewed in the context of the existing educational situation.

Rabindranath Tagore is generally known to all as India's great poet, writer, artist and cultural ambassador. The educational institution which he founded at Bholpur with the name of Santiniketan, represents a reaction, if not a revulsion, against the narrow, prosaic, secular and soulless education which the state provides for children in its schools. It is cut off from the springs of the people's life and culture. Tagore, who was not merely a literary genius but also combined in himself the manifold values of culture,

felt that such a narrow curriculum deriving its content as well as its inspiration from foreign sources and relying on the medium of a foreign language, could not possibly provide the right type of social, moral and aesthetic education. Moreover, it was much too formal and stereotyped and hide-bound and rigidly governed by rules and regulations. He, therefore, established a new institution, not bound by the curricula or the regulations of the Government Education Department, where education was to be imparted in an atmosphere of freedom, where children were to be nourished on the rich resources of Indian art and literature, of Indian life and ways: Thus, Tagore brought about a re-approachment between education and folk culture, and was perhaps the first Indian educationist in modern times to try and exploit fully the educational resources of art, which generally, Indian schools had tended to ignore altogether. At Santiniketan, the students are given plenty of opportunities for social work and community service in the villages, education thus losing some what its unrealistic and theoretical complexion. It is also to be noted that, while its genius is essentially Indian, its outlook is modern and international and this has been greatly facilitated by the fact that Tagore's personal attraction drew several distinguished scholars from Asia, Europe and America to come and spend their time at Santiniketan which thus acquired something of the status of an International University. Tagore's experiment at Santiniketan is important because it gave a new confidence to Indian educationists; they realized, after many decades, that they should not remain content with merely taking but that they had also something valuable to give to the world.

Santiniketan was a national educational experiment. It has played a very important part

in the field of Indian education and cultural developments. Rabindranath's contribution to educational thought and practice is qualitatively different from that of any other educational thinker. In fact, the quality of his contribution is the quality of his greatness. His greatness consists in his oneness, in his indivisibility. He did not live a life of disconnected fragments. This cohesive character of his greatness, which is the despair of dissection, has coloured his educational thought irretrievably. He always considered education in terms of a synthetic view of life. He insisted on all the different elements of man being brought into complete harmony.

"Gandhiji's contribution consists in the life philosophy, the social outlook he seeks to impart through craft work, the spirit, the mental temper he wants to inculcate. He makes craft-work the pivot of his educational system, as he made *charka* the pivot of the national struggle for independence. Education, as he conceived it, is no less a struggle for freedom—freedom from ignorance, inefficiency, insecurity, oppression, exploitation, injustice. Education for its own sake has obviously no appeal to GandhijiHe can conceive education only as a dynamic force leading to a definite destination."¹

The central purpose of Gandhi's scheme of education is character-building. According to him, character is the expression of the whole personality, including its spiritual and ethical aspects. It is not an unrelated phenomena. According to him character-building is possible through the medium of craft-work. In his scheme he tries to bring the moral and spiritual aspects of human personality under educational control.

1. Page 80—*Viswa Bharati Quarterly*, Vol. XIII, May-Oct., 1947 Parts I, II.

"In a flash of genius, Gandhiji discovers that children have so long been denied the privilege of receiving economic training only on a foolish pretext."² Perhaps many may not agree with him. But yet character and economic training are the two important considerations that weigh with Gandhi when he makes his choice of a suitable vehicle. He can impart through this vehicle his philosophy of non-violence and truth which in fact represents one abiding aspect of Indian culture. That is how Gandhi's system becomes completely Indian without ceasing to be universal.

Another important aspect of Gandhi's contribution to educational thought lies in the direction of the productive work which is given its rightful place in child life. "The positiveness and daring with which Gandhiji gives productive work its rightful place in child life reveals his unerring instinct in respects of the values of life."³

The idea of world citizenship is not only implicit but explicit in his scheme of education. "In adumbrating his educational plan, Gandhiji harmonises natural interest with international relationships, practical expediency with educational theory, the school with the family, the society, the nation and the world."⁴

Further, "the dominating purpose of Gandhiji's system of education is to ensure the production of character on a mass scale, a character which may develop individual possibilities freely only within the limits of one supreme ideal which it must accept and strive to realise in co-operation with brothers of the same faith."⁵

2. Page 82—*Ibid.*

3. Page 83—*Ibid.*

4. Page 84—*Ibid.*

5. Page 84—*Ibid.*

In Gandhi's system the student learns through the basic craft and learns mainly whatever knowledge can be co-related with it. He looks at the world through a social purpose which tinges the things viewed with its own interest and rescues them from the vagueness of an unrelated generality.

The country is indebted to Rabindranath Tagore, for leaving an immense heritage in the form of an educational experiment and other activities. The national education of to-morrow can adopt the rich lessons of those experiments. Tagore emphasised the finer sides of life in the form of music, song and dance which meant fulness of life. But yet with all his visionary love for the finer life, the poet did not forget the problem of life's practical necessities. He was not for education being dragged out of its native elements. Further, his experiments in education had definite social aims—to build up a social structure; to achieve the ideal society through education.

What Rabindranath has achieved is more a thing of the spirit than that of externals. It is not the organization and co-ordination of various institutions that is important but the atmosphere of ideas that he has created in the asrama. He recognized the fact that the modern educated Indian is a false copy of his Western contemporary. Repelled by these modern products—cut flowers of humanity without roots, he felt that true education must spring from the deeper side of a man's nature.

It was Tagore's ambition that the ideal which India possessed in the past should come in its essence, though not in its entire education; it should make for the culture of the soul, and not merely for the feeding of intellect or the cramming of

memory. His hatred is for modern schools, which are more or less factories, in his opinion, specially designed for grinding out uniform results and as a result, no account being taken of individual variations—no freedom for the expansion of the soul or the progress of liberal thought. He characterised the results of the tyranny of the educational system as the mechanisation of mind and the sterilisation of the intellectual seed-plots, the artistic, moral and spiritual sides being drowned in the study of scientific formulas and social laws. He condemned the scheme of examinations which vulgarised the minds of students—they do not care for what is true but what will fetch them marks ; not knowledge for the sake of knowledge but for the sake of success at the examinations is the governing principle of their whole study. Therefore, Tagore conceives of true education as that which not merely gives information but makes one's life in harmony with all existence. The object of education according to him is to give man the unity of truth.

His asram, Santiniketan has not only been an educational institution for Indian children, but also a great centre of world culture and civilization. Rabindranath has earned the eternal gratitude of the people by his unique educational institution at Santiniketan including the Department of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan. Even if he had done nothing else, his work at Santiniketan would have entitled him to a high place among the makers of modern India.

Tagore's idealistic school at Santiniketan is no doubt a notable departure from the current educational system of the country, intended to foster the deeper values in the upbringing of the young. Life in the open air, freedom from restrictions of all kinds, natural and joyous comradeship between the human being and his natural surroundings, free

scope in the fullest expression of the child's inborn talents constitute some of the features of his educational work. The development of his small school later, into a world university, Viswa-Bharati, constitutes a unique landmark in international understanding. All his life, he dreamt of a true internationalism. Life to him was a great festival to which each nation had to bring its own lamp. The aim of his international university was to make a cultural centre to which all seekers of truth could come and take a share in lighting the lamp of human knowledge. In one sense, his international university may as well be considered to be the culmination of Rabindranath's life work—the concretisation of his dream of inter-racial understanding.

Santiniketan, Tagore's forest retreat, quite like the schools of ancient India, really offers a sharp contrast to highly organized modern universities, the peculiar feature about it being that the entire life of Santiniketan was centred on the great personality of Tagore. It is the difference between personality and organization. Personal influence has counted far more than anything else. So long as Tagore was living, the poet was the school's pervading presence. In fact, "no school in the world can be richer in personal influences, varied and striking."⁶

A study of India's culture in a historical perspective, no doubt reveals the truth that it is in the ancient line of Gurus, rather than through organised seats of learning maintaining their existence for long periods of time, that India has possessed and enriched her culture so far. Perhaps, in a sense, Tagore's Santiniketan may be the last flicker of the immemorial cultural tradition of India.

6. Page 191—*Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist*—Edward Thomson, Oxford University Press, 1948.

Rabindranath is also remarkable for the fact that he combined in himself Eastern idealism with Western realism. He attempted to revive the ancient culture of India and then of seeking a higher unity between India's traditions and Western science. Judged correctly, perhaps, apart from his writings, Santiniketan is the most precious gift he has left behind as a legacy to mankind.

To conclude, the greatness of Rabindranath Tagore lies in the fact, that he could detect with an unerring eye whatever was foreign to, or even out of harmony with the central process in which life constantly reorganises and recreates itself—the process that is called education. This was apparent even when as a boy, he took a definite aversion to the current system of education and boldly refused to have anything to do with it. It is not mainly as a critic of the existing system that he is great in the field of educational thought. He not only knew what was wrong, but knew what is right. It was not just a new set of ideas that he offered, but a new awareness. In fact, Santiniketan was the first embodiment and visible symbol of this awareness—what it represented was some thing more than a reform, it was an educational renaissance. That was how he sought to unite with the tapovana ideal of education the Western genius which knows how to clear the path towards a definite end of practical good. To put it in a nutshell, in view of the efforts that are being made today to re-orient the educational system in order to meet the needs of free India, it is indeed curious to think that Rabindranath, nearly quarter of a century back anticipated the most progressive educational thoughts and principles yet discovered and also gave them a concrete shape in his small modest-looking institution.

SECTION VII

The Philosophic Undercurrents in Tagore's Educational Ideas

Humanism

Rabindranath's approach to education is humanistic. He believes that, "Living ideals can never be set into clock-work arrangement, giving accurate account of it every second. And those who have faith in their ideas have to test its truth in discords and failures that are sure to come to tempt them from their path. I for my part believe in the principle of life, in the soul of man, more than in methods. I believe that the object of education is the freedom of mind which can only be achieved through the path of freedom—though freedom has its risk and responsibility as life itself has. I know it for certain, though most people seem to have forgotten it, that children are living beings—more living than grown-up people who have built their shells of habit around them. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for their mental health and development that they should not have mere schools for their lessons, but a world whose guiding spirit is personal love."¹ Tagore wants to establish harmony of relationship through humanism in education. According to him, only fulness of expression would signify full life and therefore, he observes: "Therefore our childhood should be given its full

1. pp. 40-41, Lectures And Addresses—Rabindranath Tagore—(Selected by Anthony X. Soares). Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1950.

measure of life's draught, for which it has an endless thirst. The young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it. And this is what our regular type of school ignores with an air of superior wisdom, severe and disdainful. It forcibly snatches children away from a world full of the mystery of God's own handiwork full of the suggestiveness of personality."²

Tagore's early education has given him knowledge of the wrong from which children of men suffer. He considers children to be God's own creation. Education of sympathy is far more important to him than mere knowledge which is power. This becomes evident when he observes: "We have come to this world to accept it, not merely to know it. We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fulness by sympathy. The highest education is that which does not merely give us information, but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed."³ Then, Tagore goes on describing the unnatural way in which education is being given in schools. "From our very childhood habits are formed, and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature, and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information interested."⁴

2. p. 19, *Lectures And Addresses—Rabindranath Tagore—* (Selected by Anthony X. Soares), Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1950,

3. p. 21, *Lectures And Addresses—Rabindranath Tagore—* (Selected by Anthony X. Soares), Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London 1950

4. p. 21 *Ibid.*

True humanism which is one of the most important characteristics in Tagore's approach to problems of education, is quite evident when he says, "we have obstacles in human nature and in outer circumstances. Some of us have a feeble faith in boy's minds as living organisms and some have the natural propensity of doing good by force. On the other hand the boys have their different degrees of receptivity and there are a good number of inevitable failures. Delinquencies make their appearance unexpectedly, making us suspicious as to the efficacy of our own ideals."⁵

Idealism :

Tagore wanted to develop and give form to some ideal of education, so that the children might be brought up in an atmosphere of a higher life. He deeply feels that "for some time past education has lacked idealism in its mere exercise of an intellect which has no depth of sentiment. The one desire produced in the heart of the students has been an ambition to win wealth and power—not to reach some inner standard of perfection, not to obtain self-emancipation."⁶ His ideal was the spiritual perfection and not the mere enjoyment of material objects.

Tagore also wanted the ideal of the age to find a place in the centre of all education. The ideal of the age according to him, was racial unity which was to be brought about by living relationship of the people. In this connection he observes : "Our education must enable every child to grasp and to fulfil this purpose of the age, not to defeat it, by acquiring the habit of creating divisions and of

5. pp. 9-10, *My School*—Pamphlet No. 1, Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa—Bharati

6. pp. 67-68. *Talks In China*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa—Bharati Book-shop, 1925.

cherishing national prejudices. There are, of course, natural differences in human races which should be preserved and respected and the mission of our education should be to realise our unity inspite of them, to discover truth through the wilderness of their contradictions."⁷ Tagore gave effect to his ideals in his *Viswa-Bharati*. He included this ideal of unity in the activities of his institution-educational, aesthetic and social service activities. This in turn engendered in the students, love of humanity at large. They had their own freedom to grow-freedom of sympathy with all humanity, freedom from all kinds of racial and national prejudices. Thus, the freedom of mind became the greatest ideal of education for Tagore.

Rabindranath had faith in ideals, the faith which was creative. According to him, it is some great ideal which creates great societies of men; and it is blind passion which breaks them to pieces. Tagore's ideal is realisation of truth, the supreme reality, and true enjoyment in his view lies in the realisation of perfection. This, he says, can be reached, not through mere accumulation, but through renunciation of the material for the sake of the ideal. He keenly felt the need for the rebirth of ideals of perfection; age after age, taking new bodies and occupying new fields of life. Otherwise, he thinks, they will end in mere thoughtless repetitions, human beings becoming mere puppets of the past,

While recognizing the need for an ideal in education, at the same time he emphasises that the ideals which are for giving freedom to the spirit of man, are not to be shut up in a dungeon of blind habit, confined within narrow limits. According

7. p. 102, *Talks in China*—Rabindranath Tagore, *Viswa-Bharati Bookshop*, 1925.

to Tagore, an ideal to be realised, must have full freedom of scope for development. Completeness of reality will be there, where truth finds its expression in movement. He does not want Truth to be fettered. His ideal in education is not to be a static one. He knows full well that life is rebellious ; and that it grows by breaking the forms that enclose it, the forms that only give shelter for a particular period then become a prison, if they do not change. Therefore, according to him, the standard or the ideal in education should change according to the times and dead custom will only become plagiarism from past life just as imitation would be plagiarism from other people's life. Both he thought, would constitute slavery to the unreal. Therefore, Tagore's faith is in an ideal which is creative and, he is convinced that life frees itself only through its growth and not through its borrowings. That is why, Tagore does not like the ideal of the West to be followed in Indian educational system, which is not only not necessary, but unsuited to the genius and needs of India. Hence he observes : "It will never do for the Orient to trail behind the West like an over-grown appendix, vainly trying to lash the sky in defiance of the divine. For humanity, this will not only be a useless excess, but a disappointment and a deception. For, if the East ever tries to duplicate Western life, the duplicate is bound to be a forgery."⁸

According to Tagore, a civilization can remain healthy and strong only as long as it contains in its centre some creative ideal that binds its members in a rhythm of relationship—a relationship which is beautiful and not merely utilitarian, when this creative ideal—dharma gives place to some overmastering passion, then he thinks, that such a civilization will burst into conflagration. Therefore,

8. p. 156, *Talks in China*—Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati Bookshop, 1925.

he pleads, that if society is not to become extinct, it must have for its central force, a great spiritual ideal and not merely an impetus to progress. Tagore's ideal in education is to bring about reconciliation among the conflicting forces of society, by the perfection of human relationship, by controlling the egotistic instincts of man and by giving him a philosophy of his fundamental unity.

Rabindranath's ideal in education is a comprehensive one. It has for its field of activity the whole of human nature from its depth to its height. Its fundamental aspect is unity. The ideal society which he wanted to bring about should have dance in its steps, music in its voice, beauty in its limbs, metaphor in stars and flowers, maintaining its harmony with God's creation. He does not want living society to become, under the tyranny of a prolific greed, like an over-laden market-cart, jolting and creaking on the road, that leads from things to nothing, tearing ugly ruts across the green life till it breaks down, under the burden of vulgarity, on the wayside, reaching nowhere.

His ideal in education was the establishment of the spiritual relationship between peoples. He believed in the bringing of the different human races close together in bonds of love and co-operation. He openly confessed his faith in higher ideals. He believed that through them he could best serve the higher purposes of life. What was the mission or the higher purpose of his life? He declared: "I represent in my institution an ideal of brotherhood, where men of different countries and different languages can come together. I believe in the spiritual unity of man and therefore I ask you to accept this task from me."⁹

In his attempt to bring about a spiritual unity of man, he did not want to lose sight of men's moral wealth of wisdom, which in his view was of far greater value than a system that produced endless materials and a physical power that was always on the war path. He sought his strength in union, in an unwavering faith in righteousness and never in the egotistic spirit of separateness. That ideal, in his opinion, was to be achieved, not through the mechanical method of organization but through a spirit of true sympathy. He wanted to rescue man from the organized power of the machine by that living power of the spirit which grows into strength, not through mere addition, but through organic assimilation.

Tagore's faith in human nature was such that he applied moral ideals not only for individuals but also for the entire race. He refused to believe that human society had reached its limit of moral possibility. And being an idealist to the core, he was convinced that one should work all one's strength for the seemingly impossible. In his educational mission, the faith that there is a constant surging in the depth of human soul for the attainment of the perfect, the urging which will help one in all one's endeavour for the good, has been his only asset and his life's work. The essence of Tagore's idealism has been expressed by Tagore himself as thus : "I try to assert in my words and works that education has its only meaning and object in freedom—freedom from ignorance about the laws of universe, and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world. In my institution I have attempted to create an atmosphere of naturalness in our relationship with strangers, and the spirit or hospitality which is the virtue in men that made civilization possible."¹⁰

10. p.71, Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Canada-P.C. Mahalanobis, Viswa-Bharati, Bulletin No. 14, 1929.

It is Tagore's deep conviction that man has the right to judge and to guide the mind of man to a proper point of view, to the vision of ideality in the heart of the real. What is that vision of ideality ? "Education in all its different forms and channels has its ultimate purpose in the evolving of a luminous sphere of human mind from the nebula that has been rushing round ages to find in itself an eternal centre of unity. We individuals, however small may be our power and what ever corner of the world we may belong to, have the claim upon us to add to the light of the consciousness that comprehends all unity."¹¹

True idealism in the educational philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore is to be found reflected in the following when he says that an ideal school "..... must be an ashram where men have gathered for the highest end of life, in the peace of nature ; where life is not merely meditative, but fully awake in its activities, where boys' minds are not being perpetually drilled into believing that the ideal of the self-idolatry of the nation is the truest ideal for them to accept ; where they are bidden to realize man's world as God's kingdom to whose citizenship they have to aspire ; where the sun rise and sun set and the silent glory of stars are not daily ignored ; where nature's festivities of flowers and fruit have their joyous recognition from man ; and where the young and the old, the teacher and the student, sit at the same table to partake of their daily food and the food of their eternal life."¹²

Realism :

Tagore is not to be mistaken for being simply

11. " p.72,—Ibid.

12. " p.10. My School - Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati pamphlet No. 1.

an idealist in education. He combined Eastern Idealism with Western Realism in a remarkable fashion. He not only tried to revive the traditional culture of India but also sought a higher unity between Eastern ideals and Western science. Tagore's own words best explain his realism: "The last point is that our education should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied co operations. For, true education is to realise at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings."¹³

The object that Tagore had when he started the Surul Farm, the Institute of Rural Reconstruction and the Siksha-Satra was to combine idealism and make education as realistic and as practical as possible. An insight into his realism can be obtained when he observes: "Our centre of culture should not only be the centre of the intellectual life of India but the centre of her economic life also. It must cultivate land, breed cattle to feed itself and its students; it must produce all necessities, devising the best means and using the best materials calling science to its aid. Its very existence should depend upon the success of its industrial ventures carried out on the co-operative principle which will unite the teachers and students in a living and active bond of necessity."¹⁴ He further adds: "Such an institution must group round it all the neighbouring villages and vitally unite them with itself in all its economic endeavours. Their housing accommodation, sanitation, the improvement of their moral and intellectual life-should form the object of the social side of its activity. In a word, it should

13. p. 2, *The Centre of Indian Culture*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Book-shop, 1951.

14. p. 41, *Ibid.*

never be like a meteor—only a stray fragment of a world—but a complete world in itself, self-sustaining, independent, rich with ever-flowing life, radiating light across space and time, attracting and maintaining round it a planetary system of dependent bodies, imparting life-breath to the complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic, bound by social bonds and aspiring towards spiritual freedom.”¹⁵ The above illustrates the remarkable way in which Tagore combined idealism with realism.

Tagore’s ideal behind the Siksha-Satra which he started in 1924 is also another clue to his realism in education. Tagore himself explains his aim as follows: “The primary object of an institution of this kind,” he said, “should be to educate one’s limbs and mind not merely to be in readiness for all emergencies but also to be in perfect tune in the symphony of response between life and world.”¹⁶ “This is how he sought to unite with the ‘tapovana’ ideal of education the Western genius which knows how to clear the path towards a definite end of practical good.”¹⁷

“In working out the full educational purpose of Viswa-Bharati, Rabindranath Tagore has consistently refused to allow any divorce to take place between the scholarly and retired life, academic culture, on the one hand and the hard struggle for existence among the masses on the other.”¹⁸ Tagore knew fully well that the problem of the people of

15. pp. 41-42, *The Centre of Indian Culture—Rabindranath Tagore*, Viswa-Bharati Bookshop, 1951.

16. p. 1, *Siksha Satra*, Bulletin No. 21, Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati, Jan. 1949.

17. p. ii, *Siksha Satra*, Bulletin No. 21, Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati, Jan. 1949.

18. p. 33, *The Viswabharati* by Rabindranath Tagore and Andrews; G. A. Natesan & Co., 1923.

India was essentially an agricultural problem and therefore, realising that, he started the Surul Farm near Santiniketan. It has been carrying on the economic reconstruction of Indian village life on realistic lines. "This development of Surul represents to the poet's own mind another aspect of the inner spirit of man to attain unity. For, if the Viswa-Bharati ideal of human brotherhood is to be fulfilled, there is obviously needed, through the work of education, a healing of the world-wide breach between the rich and the poor, the scholar and the labourer, the learned and the unlearned, as well as a solution of the conflicts and divisions which have taken place both in the creeds and among the races of mankind."¹⁹

In his realism there is no tinge of rank materialism or pure pragmatism in his educational philosophy. He always emphasised the principal characteristics of the Eastern mind, namely—not setting too high a price upon success through gaining advantage but upon self-realization through fulfilling the dharma or the ideals. His aim in education was not to simply imitate the west but to try to appreciate and assimilate the best in them and make it their own. He contended that if the East ever tried to duplicate Western life, the duplicate was bound to be a forgery.

Naturalism:

Another great feature of Tagore's educational philosophy is naturalism which pervades throughout. He is always against the artificial methods of teaching and learning. He is a great naturalist to the core in Education. The city-built education arranged in the over-crowded class-rooms, with no room for expansion of the

19. pp. 34-35, *The Viswabharati* by Rabindranath Tagore & Andrews, G. A. Natesant & Co., 1923.

mind and soul and no freedom of movement for the body, where the natural doors of information are barred, are great sources of hindrance, for the free growth of mind, according to Tagore. He very aptly expresses : "Children with their freshness of senses come directly to the intimacy of this world. This is the great gift they have. They must accept it naked and simple and must never again lose their power of immediate communication with it. For our perfection, we have to be vitally savage and mentally civilized; we should have the gift to be natural with nature and human with human society."²⁰

He further adds: "The misery which I felt was owing to the crowded solitude in which I dwelt in a city, where man was everywhere with never a gap for the non-human. My banished soul sitting in the civilized isolation of town-life cried within me for the enlargement of the horizon of its comprehension..... The inexpensive power to be happy which along with other children I brought into the world was being constantly worn away by friction with the brick and mortar arrangement of life, by monotonously mechanical habits and the customary habit of respectability."²¹ The above is an excellent illustration of the misery of unnaturalness in education from which Tagore had to suffer in his early boyhood at Calcutta. Naturally, his mind craved for freedom-naturalism in education.

Plenty of illustrations are available regarding naturalistic tendencies in Tagore's stories for children. In his stories, he confesses his belief in the identity of Nature and man, of Nature and

20. p. 6, A Poet's School—Rabindranath Tagore, Bulletin No. 9, Viswa-Bharati, July, 1946.

21. p. 6, *Ibid.*

super-nature. He is very tender towards his human folk, especially to his women of sorrow and children, his favourite child of Nature. From his very early days, Nature was a kind of loving companion always with him and always revealing to him some fresh beauty. "Rabindranath has the eye which pierces into the secret of which the natural fact is the sign and prophecy."²² As he was a true seer, he could see spiritual significance in natural facts and his poetic temper hear the voice of spirit crying aloud in nature. No wonder, then, that Tagore the poet-educationist, advocates a life in nature and in the open as the best means of spiritual progress. Tagore remarks: "It is callousness which robs us of the simple power to enjoy and dooms us to the indignity of snobbish pride in furniture and the foolish burden of expensive things."²³

Since Nature has great significance for Tagore, he did not feel the necessity for imparting religious instructions. According to him "the best way to derive divine inspiration is to lose oneself in the contemplation of nature. He does not lay stress on religious instruction in the Bholpur school, but believes that the religious feeling and piety will work their way into the life of the students, if the environment is pure and noble."²⁴ Tagore's own words best explain this: "We do not want now-a-days temples of worship and outward rites and ceremonies. What we really want is an asram. We want a place where the beauty of nature and the noblest pursuits of man are in a sweet har-

22. p. 20, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*—S. Radhakrishnan, Macmillan & Co., 1918.

23. p. 9, *A Poet's School* — Rabindranath Tagore, Bulletin No. 9, Viswa-Bharati, July, 1946.

24. p. 22, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*—S. Radhakrishnan, Macmillan & Co., 1918.

mony. Our temple of worship is there, where outward nature and human soul meet in union."^{24a}

In another context, Tagore expresses his condemnation of unnaturalism in education in the following words: "We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates. He was born in the human world but is banished into the world of living gramaphones, to expiate for the original sin of being born in ignorance. Child nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment."²⁵ With his great understanding of child nature, he proclaims: "we all know children are lovers of the dust; their whole body and mind thirst for sun light and air as flowers do. They are never in a mood to refuse the constant invitations to establish direct communication which come to their senses from the universe."²⁶

He wanted the students to develop their sensitivity to the touch of life and nature. He believed that the development of these senses in a natural manner, lent grace and dignity to the human being. Since his aim is the perfection of man in life, Nature is considered to be an essential part of one's life and environment. Therefore, life, without knowledge of nature is useless and in his view, a knowledge of nature cannot be gained except through one's own personal and direct experience. He would not even recommend shoes to be worn

24a. p. 22, Ibid.

25. p. 21, Lectures and Addresses—Rabindranath Tagore (Selected by Anthony X. Soares), Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1950. (Indian Ed.).

26. p. 2, My School—Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati, Pamphlet No.1.

by children, though he would not banish them altogether, since he believed that the wearing of shoes lessened the responsibility of the soles of the feet of children. For Tagore, it goes against nature to wear shoes. He does not want the soles of children's feet to be deprived of their natural education provided for them by nature, free of cost. Humorously he points out: "Naturally the soles of our feet are so made that they become the best instruments for us to stand upon the earth and to walk with. From the day we commenced to wear shoes, we minimised the purpose of our feet. With the lessening of their responsibility, they have lost their dignity and now they lend themselves to be pampered with socks, slippers and shoes of all prices and shapes and misproportions. For us, it amounts to a grievance against God for not giving us hoofs instead of beautifully sensitive soles."²⁷ He further adds: "Of all the limbs we have, they are the best adapted for intimately knowing the earth by their touch. For the earth has her subtle modulations of contour which she only offers for the kiss of her true lovers - the feet."²⁸ Tagore believes that the feet have the instinct to follow the line of least resistance if they had been naturally trained. At the same time, he points out: "I know that in the practical world shoes will be worn, roads will be metalled, cars will be used. But during their period of education, should children be not given to know that the world is not all drawing-room, that there is such a thing as nature to which their limbs are made beautifully to respond?"²⁹ Therefore, for Tagore, education to be true, should not be at the cost of

27. p. 23, *Lectures and Addresses* - Rabindranath Tagore-
Selected from the speeches of the poet by Anthony X. Soares,
Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1950. (Ind. Ed).

28. p. 24, Ibid.

29. pp. 24-25, Ibid.

dissociation from nature and life. He wants children to learn to love life and nature, to come back to their fuller lives with ripened wisdom.

Tagore reacts very much against the artificial set up in education wherein nature has no place at all. He strikes a pathetic note when he observes: "But society has made its own arrangements for manipulating men's minds to fit its special patterns. These arrangements are so closely organized that it is difficult to find gaps through which to bring in nature."³⁰

Rabindranath makes a strong plea for Naturalism in his 'Centre of Indian Culture'. He states, "If our country wants fruit and shade, let it abandon brick-and-mortar erections and come down to the soil. Why cannot we boldly avoid that we shall nurture our own life-force as naturally as the pupils who used to gather round the teachers in the forest-retreats of the Vedic age ; or at Nalanda or Taxila during the Buddhist era ; or as they gather even now in the day of our down-fall, in the tols and chatuspathis."³¹

What kind of natural school was that of Rabindranath Tagore ? He himself describes his school as such: "Knowing some thing of the natural school which Nature herself supplies to all her creatures, I established my institution in a beautiful spot, far away from the town, where children had the greatest freedom possible, in this above all, that I did not force upon them lessons for which

30. p. 26, *Lectures and Addresses*—Rabindranath Tagore, selected from the speeches of the poet by Anthony X. Soares, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1950, (Ind. Ed.)

31. p. 26, *The Centre of Indian Culture*—Rabindranath Tagore, Viswa-Bharati Bookshop, 1951.

their mind was unfitted.”³² Tagore, always had it in his mind to create an atmosphere which he felt was more important than the teaching of the class room. In fact the proper atmosphere of true naturalism is there all the time in his institution—the birds sing to the awakening of light in the morning, at night the stars bring peace, and the evening brings its own silence. There was the open beauty of the sky and the different seasons revolved before the eyes of all in the magnificence of their colour. Further, Tagore sought the opportunity of instituting festivals of the seasons for establishing perfect touch with nature. He wrote songs to celebrate the coming of spring and of the wonderful season of the rains which were sung by the students. He also added to it dramatic performances, with decorations in keeping with the seasons.

Tagore's naturalism becomes obvious when he makes a strong plea that every child should come into touch with reality, the reality which is everywhere in this great world, in man, in nature, and in every thing. A touch with reality, he thinks, can be obtained only by cultivating a sensitivity of mind to the touch of life and of nature. Speaking about his own sensitivity to the touch of life and nature, he points out: “It is a great world to which we have been born; and if I had cultivated a callousness of mind, if I had smothered this sense of touch under a pile upon pile of books, I should have lost the whole world. We can ignore what is scattered in the blue of the sky, in the basket of flowers from the seasons, in the delicate relationships of love, of sympathy and of mutual friendship, only if we have killed and smothered the sensitiveness that thrills us when we come into touch with reality, the reality which is everywhere in this great world

32. p. 100, *Talks in China*—Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati Bookshop, 1925.

in nature, in every thing. This sensitiveness I kept.”³³ Such was his faith in the immense values of natural education, that he did not want man to lose touch with reality, present everywhere, including nature.

Tagore had modelled his school after the ancient pattern of the Gurukula. He established his school in the name of Santam, Sivam and Advaitam. He also struck two fundamental notes for his asram; one, of the universe and the other, of the soul of man. His shrine is situated at the confluence of the streams of these two notes.

The very fact that Tagore selected a forest retreat for his school is in itself one of the first evidences of a behaviour pattern that gradually made the people of India identify him in their minds with the Guru of the past. Forest, according to him, unlike the desert or sea, is living. Communion with nature was the first step towards communion with life's fundamental problems and direct contact with the Guru's own life was the main part of their education in the forest school of Rabindranath.

33. p. 78, Talks in China—Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati Bookshop, 1925.

APPENDIX

Has Basic Education caught on ?

The concept of Basic Education which in practice means education through crafts, was first advocated by Gandhiji in 1937. It was introduced in primary and middle schools on a fairly large-scale after Independence. The number of Elementary/Basic schools is expected to have increased from 223,000 in 1950-51 to 385,000 in 1960-61 (during the first and second five year plan period). It has been decided in the plan era, to model all elementary schools on the basic pattern. By the end of the second plan, about 24 per cent of elementary schools will be of the basic pattern and this process has been contemplated to be carried forward in the Third Plan, with the declared objective of converting all elementary schools in the country to the Basic System of Education in due course of time.

It is this process of conversion over which educationists in the country are not agreed. To those who doubt, the protagonists of Basic Education seem to be 'over-reaching themselves, having too many ideas, with no clear-cut notion as to what they are aiming at'. Their doubts may seem to be well-founded in the context of the admission of failure of the Basic Scheme by responsible people some time back. Admittedly, there might have been many flaws in mere conception and administration of the very programme. Gandhiji wanted to revitalize the villages and place them on a firm and secure footing—a restoration of the old order

of self-sufficient villages. Necessarily therefore, Gandhiji projected the idea of basic schools mainly for Indian villages, to which he was avowedly devoted. But in actual practice, the same scheme has been foisted for urban children as well. Besides, an unfortunate thing is that the main crafts in Basic Schools are spinning, weaving and basket-making etc. which in this age of rapid technological and scientific advance, may be of little use to the city-folk. It is here, where according to some critics, there is a need for re-thinking along realistic lines.

How for Basic Education is practicable and how for not ?

One general charge against the Basic Scheme, particularly in Senior Basic Schools is that one-third of the total time is spent in craft process which consist of spinning and weaving. only two other crafts, gardening and clay-modelling are also given some time. There are of course academic studies as well, but they are supposed to be taught in correlation with spinning and weaving which also yield some money income, to the pupil. The lacuna behind the whole scheme, according to some critics, is, there is over-emphasis on craft, with the result that little of other subjects is learnt through the difficult process of correlation, which can be an effective instrument only in the hands of skilled teachers of maturity or wisdom and experience.

Nobody might question the wisdom of 'learning by doing', which is certainly essential in the school, but what is of doubtful value may be the mechanical way in which spinning and weaving have been elevated to the centre of the basic curriculum. This, according to some critics, is likely to retard educational progress. Another point that

is sometimes raised, is that to concentrate on any one craft is to make artisans out of the pupils, whereas, the whole purpose of education should be to give them a general humanistic education so that they might decide after, in which profession they are interested.

Is the Basic Scheme out-dated or is it of present validity only ?

The issue regarding the pattern of education has been decided as early as the First Plan by devising a new scheme, which broadly consisted of a craft-centred basic educational system at the elementary stage, to be followed by a higher secondary course, which included Social Studies, General Science, Mathematics and three languages. In addition to this core curriculum, the pupils were to choose specialization and practical work out of half a dozen subjects like Engineering, Agriculture, Commerce, Fine Arts, Home science etc. The schools of which there are still very few which provide these practical courses are called "Multipurpose Schools". It may be noted that the enrolment in secondary schools in 1961 was about three million and it would have been about four and a half million by the end of the Second Plan. But it is sad to recapitulate that even in regard to multipurpose schools the record of progress has not been satisfactory and the remedy so far has been only the opening of more training colleges for teachers of the specialised courses.

An anomaly of the Basic Scheme is about the end product. There is a general feeling that the students passing out of the Basic Institutions, and joining conventional schools later for their Matriculation, have been found to be very poor in academic subjects like Mathematics, Humanities, Science and English. It may be wise to admit weaknesses

and reinforce the missing links. Unless qualitative excellence is guaranteed, public confidence may not be gained, especially in the field of education, in which everybody's stake is involved. What was probably the error in the Basic Scheme, was that of building the whole curriculum around a single craft, usually spinning and weaving in deference to Mahatma Gandhi's ideas. In most States, this error has been recognized, but the idea of 'an activity-centred elementary school with a constant exploration of the physical and social environment of the child' must be retained. If the objective is to teach the child the use of his hands, some people aver that it can be achieved through introduction of suitable crafts in the conventional schools, instead of changing the entire system of education.

Progress towards Basic Education

There are quite a number of facts which have been limiting the expansion of Basic Education in the country. One such factor which has been accepted by the Planning Commission itself in its 'Third Five-Year Plan-a Draft Outline,' is that "it has been largely confined to rural areas". Another limiting factor is said to be the non-availability of requisite basic trained teachers. In the Third Plan, the emphasis on 'Teacher-training' is being considerably increased. At present, quite a large proportion of the teachers are being trained in Basic Methods. "By about 1960-61 about 70 per cent of training institutions will provide training in Basic Education. The remaining institutions will also be so converted before the end of the Third Plan. All new training institutions are to be of the basic pattern. Training facilities will be expanded as far as possible through the development of existing institutions, so that by the end of the Third Plan at least 80 per cent of the teachers employed will have been trained, short-

term courses being provided for the rest.”¹ It is gratifying to note that the Planning Commission has, in its Third Plan Draft Outline² admitted that “progress towards fully developed Basic Schools will of necessity be spread over a long period.” In view of the large numbers involved and the fact that the majority of the existing teachers have not had training in Basic Education.

There is a proposal in the Third Plan to extend the period of training for elementary school teachers to 2 years in all States. For the success of the Basic Scheme, teachers will need to be trained differently. Education at the primary level is of tremendous significance. Particularly, the first class or year of schooling requires experienced and intelligent teachers. According to the Third Plan, the programme of orientation towards the Basic Pattern has however been accepted by the Central and State Governments and some work in this regard has also already begun during the Second Plan. It has been contemplated that in the course of the Third Plan, all old and new schools will be so oriented. It is envisaged in the third plan that “these schools will take up such activities of Basic Schools as can be carried out with maximum community effort and with the measure of State assistance that can be made available for the purpose under the Plan.”³ Teacher training is contemplated to be further strengthened by establishing Extension Departments in quite a number of training schools and the existing training schools are proposed to be strengthened in respect of equipment, libraries and other facilities.

1. p. 100, Third Five Year Plan. A Draft Outline Govt. of India, Planning Commission, 1960 (June)

2. p. 101, *Ibid.*

3. p. 101, *Ibid.*

If Basic Education, which is the declared goal and objective of the Government, is to make much headway in the future at least, the entire programme may have to be overhauled in the light of the experience gained in the past and the immediate recognition of the shortcomings that have been brought to light. In the words of the Planning Commission itself:

“Progress towards Basic Education will largely depend on the steps taken to remove the shortcomings of existing Basic Institutions. This calls for much effort in ensuring adequate training, improvement in teaching methods, efficient inspection, provision of suitable literature and conscious efforts to link the activities of Basic Schools with those of the local community in the field of agriculture, village industries, community development, social education, etc.⁴

4. p. 101, Third Five-Year Plan: A Draft outline, Government of India, Planning Commission, June 1960.

